

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 1 of 66

- [2- Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller](#)
- [5- Spend Mother's Day Outside!](#)
- [5- Northern Fort Playhouse Cancels 2020 Summer Season](#)
- [6- Area COVID-19 Cases](#)
- [7- May 5th COVID-19 UPDATE](#)
- [9- Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs](#)
- [10- Weather Pages](#)
- [14- Daily Devotional](#)
- [15- 2020 Groton Events](#)
- [16- News from the Associated Press](#)



Labor Department Accepting Claims for Additional 13 Weeks of Unemployment Benefits

PIERRE, S.D. – The Department of Labor and Regulation is now accepting claims for Pandemic Emergency Unemployment Compensation (PEUC) which allows for an additional 13 weeks of benefits at the end of the regular 26 weeks of state unemployment benefits.

Workers who became unemployed as a direct result of COVID-19 may qualify for this unemployment assistance provision provided under the CARES Act. PEUC became payable for the week ending April 4, 2020, and ends the week ending Dec. 26, 2020.

"You may be eligible if you have established a claim with a benefit year that ended after July 1, 2019, and you have exhausted all 26 weeks of state benefits or your benefit year has expired," said state Labor and Regulation Secretary Marcia Hultman. "You should file a new claim at RAclaims.sd.gov."

The weekly benefit amount under PEUC is the prior weekly benefit amount plus the additional \$600 weekly payment provided for under Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation (FPUC).

"PEUC claimants must file a weekly request for payment each week to receive benefits, even though the work search requirement is currently waived," said Secretary Hultman. "You cannot file this request until the week is over on Saturday at midnight."

PEUC benefits are 100% federally funded, as are the implementation and ongoing administrative costs. Employers will not be charged for any benefits paid under a CARES Act program.

Attempts to collect unemployment benefits after quitting a job without good work-related cause is considered fraud. The CARES Act specifically provides for serious consequences for fraudulent cases including fines, confinement and an inability to receive future unemployment benefits until all fraudulent claims and fines have been repaid.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located at 10 East Railroad Ave. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 2 of 66

Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

Most of the numbers held steady today.

We're at 1,234,700 cases in the US. The increase, both in raw number and percentage, has been fairly steady for a couple of days following three consecutive days of decline in growth. NY leads with 329,405 cases, a holding pattern after three consecutive days of decline in growth rate. NJ, with 131,890 cases, shows a good decline in its rate of growth. Remaining top-10 states are as follows: MA – 72,025, IL – 68,164, CA – 60,740, PA – 54,702, MI – 45,048, FL – 37,994, TX – 35,399, and CT – 30,995. These ten states account for 70% of US cases. 6 more states have over 20,000 cases, 6 more have over 10,000, 13 more + DC over 5000, 10 more + PR, and GU over 1000, 5 more over 100, and VI + MP under 100.

Here's the latest on movement in new case reports. Those with substantial numbers of cases which are not showing much change include CA, IN, PA, NC, FL, MI, LA, and SC. States where new case reports are increasing include IL, OH, TX, VA, GA, WA, MD, and TN. States where new case reports are decreasing include NY, CT, NJ, CO, MA, RI, MI, and DE. We'll watch the states showing increases and hope those with decreases continue the decline.

There have been 73,482 deaths in the US. Today the rate of growth held steady, still over 2000 new deaths reported. The fact that this sets a pace for 60,000 deaths a month is mind-boggling; that's a lot of bereaved families and friends. NY has 25,720, NJ has 8549, MA has 4420, MI has 4250, PA has 3300, IL has 2973, CT has 2718, CA has 2476, and LA has 2094. There are 5 more states over 1000 deaths, 4 more over 500, 19 more + DC over 100, and 13 + PR, GU, VI, and MP under 100.

I had the intention to write about something else entirely tonight, but I kept getting questions about this video that's been circulating cyberspace, "Doctors in Black: Plandemic." (This is not a typo; the word is Plandemic.) It started yesterday when someone contacted me, asking what I knew about a Dr. Judy Mikovits. The name rang a bell, but I had to Google to refresh my memory. This is a researcher who had worked on retroviruses, and then got into some professional trouble. There was a paper alleging an association between a virus and chronic fatigue syndrome that was questioned and then withdrawn from publication. She was investigated and fired over concerns about her integrity, a career-ender in research fields. She was later arrested on charges of stealing lab notebooks and other materials from the Institute which had fired her. I had understood she had returned some of the items and charges were dismissed. I don't know what that means for sure. Since then, she has been touting claims that retroviruses contaminate a large proportion of vaccines that are given and that a virus (the same one she earlier claimed causes chronic fatigue syndrome) causes Parkinson's disease, autism, and multiple sclerosis. For the record, there is no evidence at all in the record that any of this is true.

And now, it appears she's turned her sights on Covid-19, claiming it was caused by a bad strain of flu vaccine, that no vaccine is needed for it, that Big Pharma stands to make a killing on the vaccine and that's why they're pushing vaccine, and that masks will activate the virus and infect the wearer. Hence the current video which, I understand, YouTube keeps removing from its site, although I had no trouble finding a copy to watch. It's about a half-hour long, and I've earned another medal or trophy or something for sitting through it just for all of you. Here's my assessment:

I did not fact-check this video item-by-item because I don't have that kind of time; but there were enough suspicious claims and false assertions that I feel confident in saying this is the worst sort of conspiracy-mongering. A couple of examples:

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 3 of 66

(1) She claims that there is a vast cabal of research scientists on the take, all receiving huge payments from Big Pharma and the government to cover up the “truth” about treatments for various diseases, that they are withholding effective “natural” treatments because they can’t charge for them and make lots of money, letting thousands or even millions of people die so they can arrange to patent their own treatments and receive royalties from their sale. Anthony Fauci is apparently the head conspirator in this effort, and he and Dr. Robert Redfield, Director of the CDC, coerce and entice all the other research scientists into going along with the plan. It is not clear whether these guys are controlling all of the scientists in the world or just those in the US, but I would think it would be necessary to control them all over the world or the ones in Europe or wherever would just mess up the plan, wouldn’t they? The idea that you could get thousands or tens of thousands of research scientists to join in this huge conspiracy of folks who care nothing for human life and willingly sacrifice patients to the profit motives of Big Pharma and Dr. Fauci is simply not credible. Is everyone who goes into medical research a terrible human being? If not, how on earth do you keep all those folks quiet? Like no one was asked to join and refused? Of those who did refuse, none of them blew the whistle? Or did some speak up and then had their careers ruined? If so, how did no one ever hear of this or notice all these scientists spuriously accused of wrongdoing and ruined? How many research scientists can you ruin without anyone noticing? Or are they all so amoral that they just joined the conspiracy and kept quiet? I have found that it’s tough to keep a secret when there are three or four people in on it; I find it fantastical to imagine that tens of thousands have been engaged in this level of systematic deception without a whisper of it arising except from this one brave former scientist.

(2) She also claimed that influenza vaccination makes you susceptible to Covid-19, citing a military study that “proved” this—more of the stuff “they” don’t want you to know. The military study referenced in the video was conducted by the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Branch in 2019 using data collected in 2017 (the dates are important here) to explore the possibility of something called virus interference, the hypothesis that getting a virus infection like influenza will temporarily keep your immune system too busy to protect you from another respiratory virus; the purpose of the study was to determine whether flu vaccination would have the same kind of effect as was postulated for an active infection. There was a hint in the data from this study that flu vaccination might temporarily increase the likelihood of getting a coronavirus infection, but of course, at the time the study was done (data from 2017, remember), this particular coronavirus wasn’t infecting humans (or likely even in existence in its present infectious form), so there’s no way it proved anything about Covid-19. The coronaviruses referenced in the report were the four coronaviruses that cause seasonal colds, a different sort of thing entirely. Also, the association suggested by the data had not yet been adjusted for age groups or seasons and may well have been caused by random variability in the data; and it seems likely that adjustment would make the association evaporate entirely—because people of different ages and people getting exposed in different seasons can have very different rates of infection. The study’s conclusions were that the evidence does not support a connection between flu vaccination and other respiratory infections. And to repeat, the study did not draw any conclusions at all about Covid-19 because no one had even heard of it at the time the report was written.

(3) The doctor claimed that, as you wear a mask and gloves, your immunocompetence decreases, that every minute they’re on, your immune system weakens. This is false. Think how sick surgeons would be all the time if wearing masks and gloves messed with your immune responses. There is no evidentiary or rational basis for a claim like this; gloves and masks are not damaging to the immune system. There is something called the Hygiene Hypothesis which postulates that, when we sterilize and disinfect everything and keep infants and very young children so clean every minute, we are avoiding the immune challenge offered by playing in the dirt and such, and then their immune systems will not develop properly or as fast as they should. There appears to be some merit to this hypothesis, but even if it is correct, this would not support the conclusion that wearing a mask and gloves depletes your immune system. Wearing a mask and gloves to protect yourself (and others) from a dangerous pathogen is (a) not harmful in any way to your

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 4 of 66

immune system and (b) a good way to stay alive and serve your fellow humans by keeping them alive too.

(4) There was a parade of serious-looking people in scrubs, claiming to be doctors and testifying to the pressures they'd faced to misattribute patient deaths to Covid-19. They claimed they were being encouraged to call as many deaths as possible Covid-19 deaths, even when they were not. You know how, in documentaries, each speaker appears on screen over a caption that gives their name and their credentials? These "doctors" were not labeled with their names or specialties; they just appeared on screen and told their stories. Since they were consenting to being filmed, there could have been no expectation of anonymity; so it makes no sense that this information was omitted. My suspicion is that they were not all actually doctors.

(5) One of the doctors (I think it may have been a Minnesota state Representative who actually is a doctor and has been all over the TV with these claims) then made the assertion that Medicare writes a check to hospitals for \$13,000 for a patient identified as having Covid-19 and \$39,000 for a patient placed on mechanical ventilation due to Covid-19. This was given as the reason for pressure to label so many deaths as Covid-19-caused—that hospitals would make a killing on these payments. This is somewhere between misleading and false. I can't track down all of the details of payment for Covid-19-related care, but it appears Medicare will cover only those who were already on Medicare. Medicaid will cover those who are uninsured, including those laid off, losing their insurance, due to the crisis. Private insurers will cover those who have such coverage. There is no DRG code (diagnosis-related group, the basis for payments to hospitals for a given category of disease/condition being treated) for Covid-19, but the disease fits into preexisting DRGs; and payment will proceed based on the DRGs coded for a patient's care. There is a 20% add-on allowed by the CARES act recently passed by Congress to help hospitals with shortfalls caused by the cancellation of elective surgeries and such during the pandemic; I am not clear whether privately-insured patients' treatment merits this payment as well or how a hospital would claim it. The amount paid for a given DRG varies in different regions of the country, so there's no flat rate for care of a Covid-19 patient who does or does not need ventilation. The figures given appear to be based on Kaiser Family Foundation estimates which listed the average payment for a patient with a similar respiratory condition that was less severe at just over \$13,000 and one requiring ventilation at just over \$40,000. So no hospital is going to happen across a \$13,000 (or \$39,000) bonus just for coding a non-Covid-19 patient as having Covid-19; the reimbursement is going to depend on DRG coded for the kind and extent of care rendered irrespective of the precise diagnosis.

When a piece contains flaws as glaring and significant as these, I can give it no credibility. This looks to me to be an agenda-driven work that doesn't present real science. I'm going to guess the reason YouTube keeps taking it down is not that there are things "they" don't want you to know, but that they are trying to prevent the spread of misinformation and outright lies that could endanger the public health.

I personally think wearing gloves is overkill—especially if you're not managing them properly (a subject we talked about a while back), but please, please wear your masks when you go out in public. They protect you to some degree, and they protect others to a high degree, even if they're homemade cloth masks. Although they are some help for protecting you, it's hard to keep all incoming particles out; but it's easy to protect others by wearing one. You significantly reduce the number of particles you expel into the environment around you, and this is helpful especially if you're feeling fine because we know people showing no symptoms can be a source of infection to others. Sick people tend to stay home, but healthy-feeling ones are out and about. That's you. Don't go out without your mask. Consider it the least you can do for those around you.

As for the video, I call bullshit.

I read today about the efforts, largely successful, to manage this infection in New Mexico. The writer had interviewed a gentleman, Tim Harmon, who owns a gallery in Santa Fe, about the pandemic and responses to mitigation efforts in his state. His gallery, of course, has been closed for the duration. As he was interviewed, he mentioned that he has started to build a digital experience of his gallery so that people could "visit" without being physically present. I'm sure this was driven in some part by his interest in preserving his business, but he said something at the end which struck me: "I want to make it as real as possible. In a larger sense, I think, or at least hope, that this whole thing will usher in the future. I do know that I want the world to be a better place after this."

See? A whole lot of people are thinking about that very thing. And you know what to do about it. Pick a spot and start. No shortage of things to be done. The world will be only as good as we make it, but there's no time to lose.

Stay healthy, and I'll see you again.

Spend Mother's Day Outside!

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) is offering free fishing and park entrance Sunday, May 10, to celebrate Mother's Day.

"Now more than ever, families and moms need to be celebrated," said Parks Division Director Scott Simpson. "We are encouraging families to go out and spend a special day at their local parks, lakes and fishing spots. These activities can be done while social distancing and are a great way to make memories, have fun, and get a little bit of normal back into our lives."

The free fishing and parks entrance fee does not include camping fees. Families wanting to camp in a state park or recreation area can visit Campsd.com for campsite availability.

Northern Fort Playhouse Cancels 2020 Summer Season

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Due to the continued impact of the COVID-19 virus, the 2020 summer theater season for Northern Fort Playhouse has been canceled.

Though the cancellation wasn't an easy decision, it was the right one, said Northern Fort Playhouse Board of Directors President Sandi Jaspers.

"Difficult times require difficult decisions," Jaspers said. "It was difficult for the Northern Fort Playhouse (NFP) Board of Directors to make the decision to cancel our 2020 summer performances, but we felt that was best for the safety and well-being of our audiences, our performers and our volunteers."

Jaspers said the NFP Board has made a commitment to using summer 2020 to study ways to enhance the theater experience for audiences through improvements in performance facilities, marketing strategies, and educational opportunities for the cast and crew.

"We are looking forward to seeing everyone back for our 2021 season next year," she said.

Northern Fort Playhouse brings summer theater to historic Fort Sisseton through a partnership between the NFP board and the Northern State University School of Fine Arts.

"We know how deeply the Northern Fort Playhouse will be missed by so many this summer," said NSU School of Fine Arts Dean Dr. Kenneth Boulton. "It will make the 2021 season all the more anticipated, under the new artistic direction of Dr. Kane Anderson, NSU Assistant Professor of Acting and Directing."

For more information about Northern Fort Playhouse, visit the NFP website.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 6 of 66

Area COVID-19 Cases

	Apr. 28	Apr. 29	Apr. 30	May 1	May 2	May 3	May 4
Minnesota	4,181	4,644	5,136	5,730	6,228	6,663	7,234
Nebraska	3,374	3,784	4,281	4,838	5,326	5,659	6,083
Montana	451	451	453	453	455	455	457
Colorado	14,316	14,758	15,284	15,768	16,225	16,635	16,907
Wyoming	396	404	415	420	429	435	444
North Dakota	991	1,033	1,067	1,107	1,153	1,191	1,225
South Dakota	2,313	2,373	2,449	2,525	2,588	2,631	2,668
United States	1,012,583	1,040,488	1,070,032	1,104,161	1,133,069	1,157,945	1,180,634
US Deaths	58,355	60,999	63,019	65,068	66,385	67,680	68,934

Minnesota	+365	+463	+492	+594	+498	+435	+571
Nebraska	+16	+410	+497	+557	+488	+333	+424
Montana	+2	0	+2	0	+2	0	+2
Colorado	+437	+442	+526	+484	+457	+410	+272
Wyoming	+7	+8	+11	+5	+9	+6	+9
North Dakota	+49	+42	+34	+40	+46	+38	+34
South Dakota	+68	+60	+76	+76	+63	+43	+37
United States	+24,394	+27,905	+29,544	+34,129	+28,908	+24,876	+22,689
US Deaths	+2,100	+2,644	+2,020	+2,049	+1,317	+1,295	+1,254

	May 5	May 6
Minnesota	7,851	8,579
Nebraska	6,438	6,771
Montana	456	456
Colorado	17,364	17,830
Wyoming	452	479
North Dakota	1,266	1,323
South Dakota	2,721	2,779
United States	1,204,475	1,228,609
US Deaths	71,078	73,431

Minnesota	+617	+728
Nebraska	+355	+333
Montana	+8	0
Colorado	+457	+466
Wyoming	+8	+27
North Dakota	+41	+57
South Dakota	+53	+58
United States	+23,841	+24,134
US Deaths	+2,144	+2,353

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 7 of 66

May 6th COVID-19 UPDATE

Groton Daily Independent from Dept. of Health Lab records

Grant and Ziebach counties reported their first positive COVID-19 cases and Brookings and Oglala Lakota counties have fallen from the all-clear category.

Brown County had 5 positive for a total of 76 cases with 44 of those coming from the DemKota Beef Plant.

There were 11 more deaths in the Dakotas with five in South Dakota and six in North Dakota.

South Dakota:

Positive: +58 (2779 total) (4 more than yesterday)

Negative: +336 (16,637 total)

Hospitalized: +10 (230 total) - 72 currently hospitalized (3 less than yesterday)

Deaths: +5 (All from Minnehaha County) (29 total)

Recovered: +147 (1977 total)

Active Cases: 773 (29 less than yesterday)

Counties with no positive cases report the following negative tests (lost Grant and Ziebach counties): Bennett 14, Brule +1 (60), Butte +5 (67), Campbell 9, Custer +3 (53), Edmunds 26, Gregory 34, Haakon +1 (18), Hanson 31, Harding 1, Jackson 10, Jones 5, Kingsbury 74, Mellette +2 (14), Perkins +1 (8), Potter +1 (34), Tripp +2 (59), unassigned -187 (710).

Brookings: +1 positive (14 total)

Brown: +5 positive, +2 recovered (32 of 76 recovered) 44 of the positives are from the DemKota facility.

Day: +2 positive, +1 recovered (2 of 10 recovered)

Grant: First 2 positive cases

Lincoln: +6 positive, +7 recovered (119 of 170 recovered)

Minnehaha: +36 positive, +67 recovered (1616 of 2231 recovered)

Moody: +1 positive (7 total)

Oglala Lakota: +1 positive (2 total)

Roberts: +1 positive, +1 recovered (5 of 11 recovered)

Stanley: +3 recovered (5 of 8 recovered)

Todd: +1 positive (7 total)

Turner: +1 positive, +1 recovered (15 of 18 recovered)

Yankton: +1 positive (29 total)

Ziebach: First Positive Case

Fully recovered from positive cases (Lost: Brookings, Oglala Dakota): Aurora, Bon Homme, Buffalo, Clark, Corson, Deuel, Douglas, Faulk, Hamlin, Hand, Hutchinson, Hyde, Lake, Lawrence, Marshall, McPherson, Miner, Oglala Lakota, Sanborn, Spink, Sully, Walworth.

COVID-19 IN SOUTH DAKOTA

Active Cases	773
Currently Hospitalized	72
Recovered	1977
Total Positive Cases*	2779
Total Negative Cases*	16637
Ever Hospitalized**	230
Deaths***	29

The N.D. DoH & private labs report 2,211 completed tests today for COVID-19 with 57 new positive cases, bringing the statewide total to 1,323. NDDoH reports six new deaths.

State & private labs have reported 38,632 total tests & 37,309 negatives.

582 ND patients are recovered.

Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 8 of 66

County	Positive Cases	Recovered Cases	Negative Cases
Aurora	1	1	43
Beadle	21	19	201
Bennett	0	0	15
Bon Homme	4	4	116
Brookings	14	13	382
Brown	76	32	673
Brule	0	0	61
Buffalo	1	1	19
Butte	0	0	69
Campbell	0	0	12
Charles Mix	5	4	96
Clark	1	1	59
Clay	7	6	155
Codington	15	13	517
Corson	1	1	22
Custer	0	0	56
Davison	7	5	331
Day	10	2	64
Deuel	1	1	87
Dewey	0	0	44
Douglas	1	1	28
Edmunds	0	0	27
Fall River	2	1	66
Faulk	1	1	22
Grant	2	0	53
Gregory	0	0	34
Haakon	0	0	18
Hamlin	2	2	74
Hand	1	1	25
Hanson	0	0	31
Harding	0	0	1
Hughes	13	7	264
Hutchinson	3	3	103

Hyde	1	1	18
Jackson	0	0	11
Jerauld	6	5	39
Jones	0	0	6
Kingsbury	0	0	76
Lake	4	4	151
Lawrence	9	9	198
Lincoln	170	119	1579
Lyman	3	2	41
Marshall	1	1	52
McCook	4	3	108
McPherson	1	1	17
Meade	2	1	302
Mellette	0	0	14
Miner	1	1	23
Minnehaha	2231	1616	7003
Moody	7	4	101
Oglala Lakota	2	1	49
Pennington	16	10	910
Perkins	0	0	8
Potter	0	0	35
Roberts	11	5	125
Sanborn	3	3	41
Spink	3	3	102
Stanley	8	5	43
Sully	1	1	14
Todd	7	1	84
Tripp	0	0	60
Turner	18	15	157
Union	46	19	244
Walworth	5	5	57
Yankton	29	23	485
Ziebach	1	0	6
Unassigned****	0	0	710

RACE/ETHNICITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Race/Ethnicity	# of Cases	% of Cases
Asian, Non-Hispanic	309	11%
Black, Non-Hispanic	511	18%
Hispanic	504	18%
Native American, Non-Hispanic	157	6%
Other	366	13%
White, Non-Hispanic	932	34%

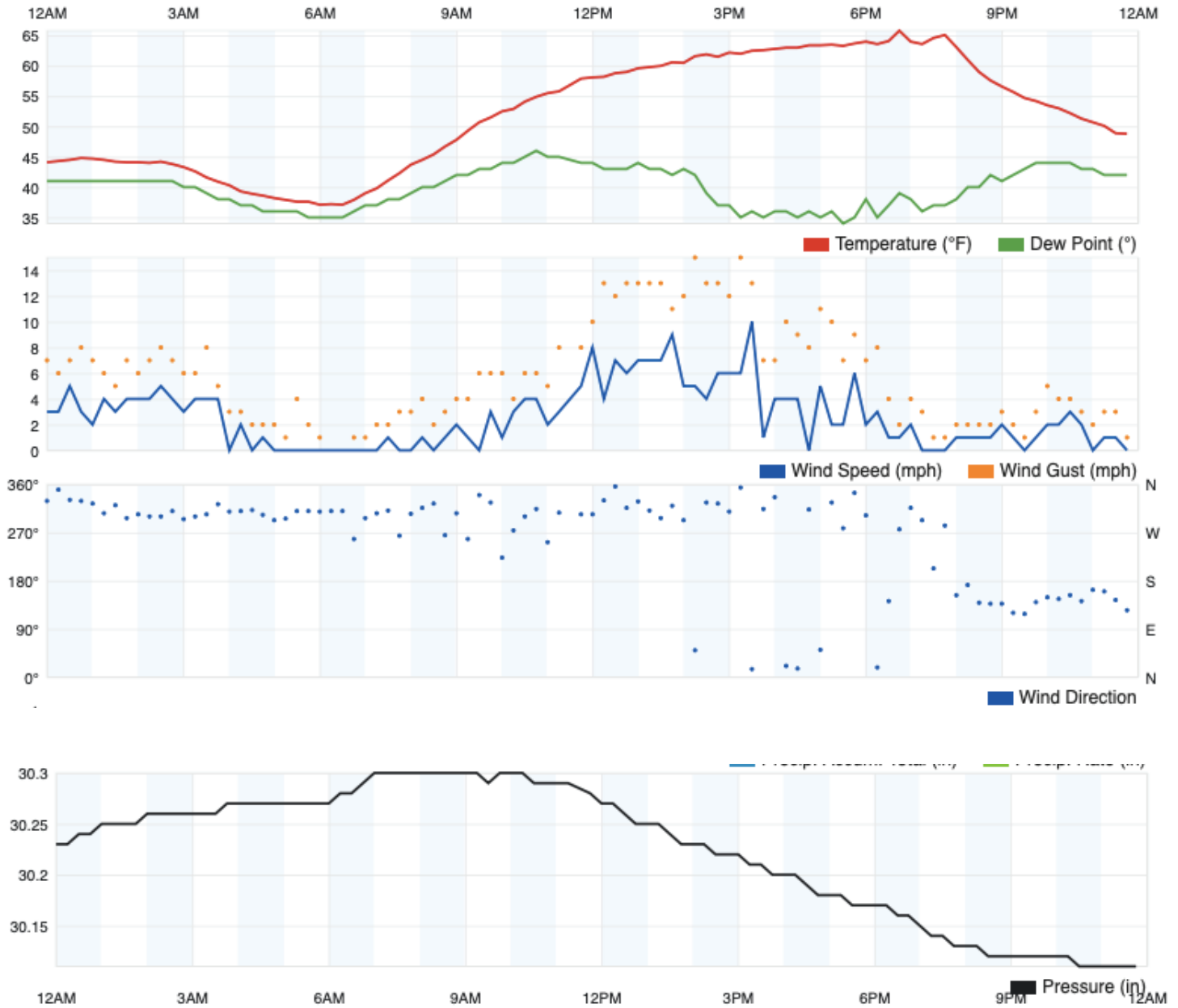
SEX OF SOUTH DAKOTA COVID-19 CASES

Sex	# of Cases	# of Deaths
Female	1307	13
Male	1472	16

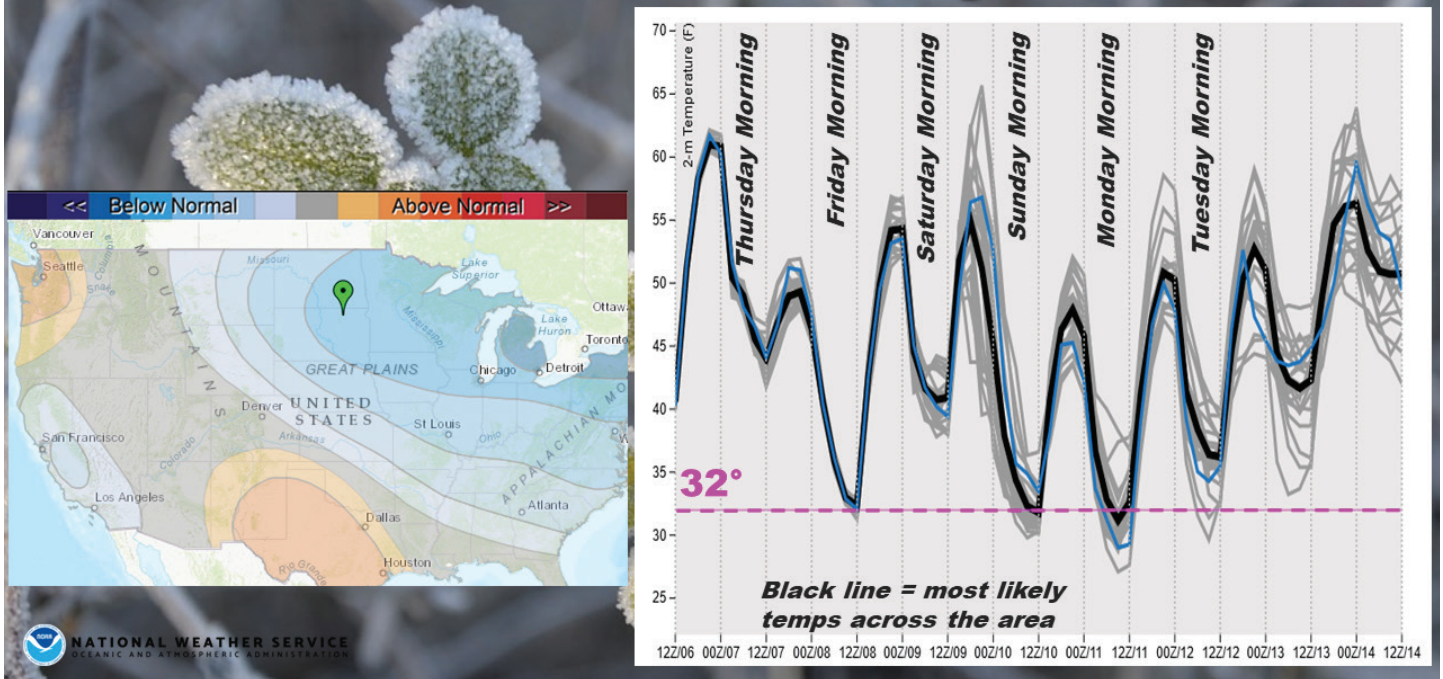
Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 9 of 66

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Near Freezing Temperatures Possible Next Few Nights



This is our last relatively mild day/night for a while, because cold air will return and persist for several straight days through about the middle of next week. Friday morning through Tuesday morning, low temperatures will approach or dip below the freezing mark. Prepare now if you have sensitive vegetation out.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 11 of 66

Today



Mostly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
Showers

High: 54 °F

Tonight



Decreasing
Clouds then
Frost

Low: 28 °F

Friday



Frost then
Sunny

High: 54 °F

Friday
Night



Partly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
Rain/Snow

Low: 35 °F

Saturday



Chance
Rain/Snow
then Chance
Showers

High: 52 °F

Mostly Cloudy with Showers Today
Heaviest Rainfall along the Missouri River
(Dry in Northeastern SD and Western MN)

Highs Today in the 50s
Lows Tonight in the Upper 20s – Low 30s



NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE
OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

Aberdeen, SD 5/7/2020 4:16 AM f t

Another round of showers can be expected today with the heaviest rainfall amounts occurring along the Missouri River. Dry conditions are expected over northeastern South Dakota and western Minnesota. Cold temperatures will follow this storm system with lows dropping into the upper 20s, to the low 30s tonight.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 12 of 66

Today in Weather History

May 7, 1896: A strong, estimated F3 tornado moved northeast from 12 miles SSW of Clark to 3 miles west of Watertown, to beyond Lake Kampeska. It was estimated to be on the ground for a distance of 30 miles. Near the start of the path, a woman was killed, and ten people were injured in one home. Parts of a house were found up to two miles away. The tornado also leveled barns near Watertown.

1840: A powerful tornado wrecked many boats at the Natchez Landing in Mississippi then plowed through the city on the bluff. The tornado killed 317 people and injured 109 others. The storm is currently the second deadliest tornado on record. The actual death toll could be higher as slaves were not counted.

1964 - The temperature at White Mountain 2, located in California, dipped to 15 degrees below zero to set a record for May for the continental U.S. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thirty-one cities in the western U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 93 degrees at Portland OR and San Jose CA were the warmest of record for so early in the season. The high of 92 degrees at Quillayute WA was a record for the month of May. The temperature at Sacramento CA hit 105 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A powerful storm in the north central U.S. produced up to three feet of snow in the Bighorn Mountains of Wyoming and the mountains of south central Montana. Up to five inches of rain drenched central Montana in less than 24 hours, and flash flooding in Wyoming caused a million dollars damage. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thirty-two cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, and 24 hour snowfall totals of 7.2 inches at Buffalo NY and 10.7 inches at Rochester NY were records for the month of May. While northerly winds ushered unseasonably cold air into the eastern U.S., temperatures warmed rapidly in the Great Plains Region, reaching the 90s in Kansas. The temperature at Manhattan KS soared from a low of 30 degrees to a high of 88 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Gale force winds lashed the northern and central Pacific coast. A wind gust of 52 mph at Eureka CA established a record for the month of May. Strong winds over northeastern Colorado, associated with a fast moving Pacific cold front, gusted to 63 mph at Peetz. Snow developed over the northwest mountains of Wyoming late in the day, and Yellowstone National Park was whitened with 6 to 14 inches. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1993: Serious flooding occurred in central Oklahoma following torrential rain and hail on this date through the 8th. Rainfall amounts on this date were generally around one inch. Oklahoma City, OK then recorded 6.64 inches of rain on the 8th, the third greatest daily rainfall amount ever observed in the city. Extensive flooding resulted, which killed four people, and the fire department had to rescue 183 others. More than 2,000 homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed. Damages were estimated at \$8 million.

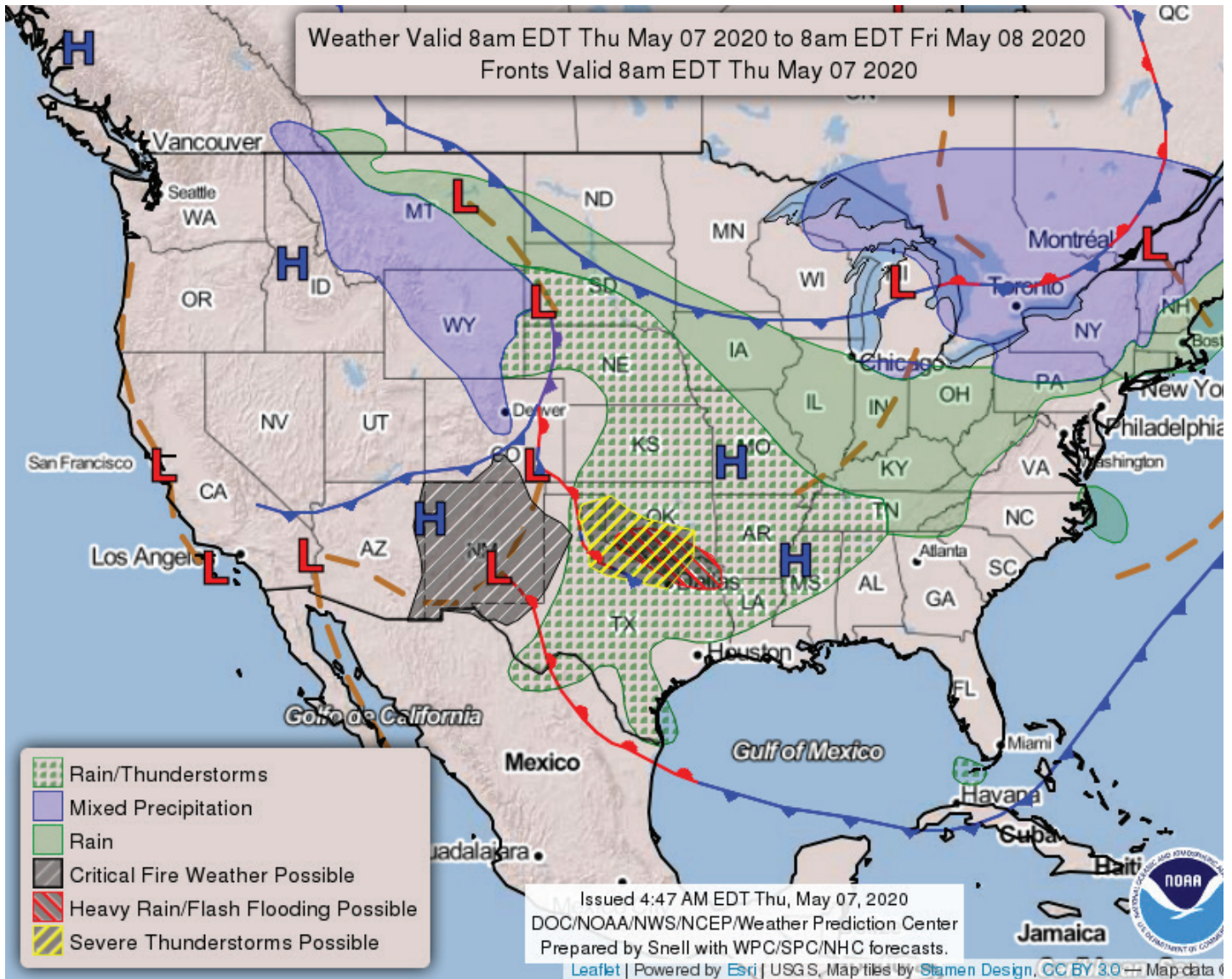
Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 13 of 66

Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 66 °F at 6:44 PM
Low Temp: 37 °F at 6:00 AM
Wind: 15 mph at 1:48 PM
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 94° in 1928
Record Low: 24° in 1919, 1982
Average High: 66°F
Average Low: 41°F
Average Precip in May.: 0.61
Precip to date in May.: 2.25
Average Precip to date: 4.64
Precip Year to Date: 4.15
Sunset Tonight: 8:49 p.m.
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:11 a.m.



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 14 of 66



START WHERE YOU ARE!

A pastor once thought that it was his responsibility to change the world. For years he struggled and worked. He finally became so discouraged that he decided to quit pastoring.

However, one day while thinking about things, he had a moment of insight. He decided to utilize a new strategy. "I'll change my Elders. That's the place for me to begin." But he soon realized that this was not going to happen. Their resistance was fierce and he soon gave up.

"Since they didn't respond," he said to himself, "I'll change the order of service." So, he rearranged the hymns, the responsive reading, when the offering was taken and when the choir would sing, but that didn't work either. People still complained about everything: the length of the service and even the sermons. Finally, they threatened to quit supporting the church financially.

Suddenly he felt threatened, and said to himself, "I wonder, Could it be me?"

David had it right when he faced himself and said: "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me and know my thoughts."

It is easier to look at the lives of others and see things in them that we think they need to change. It is also much easier to want them to change than to have the courage to change ourselves. God will work through us. But, He wants us to work on ourselves - to see the sin that is in our lives that He sees. And when He removes the sin and shortcomings from our lives, we will become like Him. And, when we do, we will become an example for others to change.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us not to be concerned about what others need to change in their lives, but what we need to change in our lives to be more like You. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 15 of 66

2020 Groton SD Community Events

- **CANCELLED** Groton Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt - City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
 - **CANCELLED** Dueling Piano's Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion
 - **CANCELLED** Fireman's Fun Night (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
 - **POSTPONED** Front Porch 605 Rural Route Road Trip
 - **CANCELLED** Father/Daughter dance.
 - **CANCELLED** Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales, (1st Saturday in May)
 - **CANCELLED** Girls High School Golf Meet at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 05/25/2020 Groton American Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services
 - 06/05/2020 Athletic Fundraiser at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/8-10/2020 St. John's VBS
 - 06/19/2020 SDSU Golf at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/20/2020 Shriner's Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 06/22/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Ladies Invitational
 - 06/26/2020 Groton Businesses Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 07/04/2020 Firecracker Golf Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 07/12/2020 Summer Fest/Car Show
 - 07/16/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Pro Am Golf Tourney
 - 07/31-08/04/2020 State American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
 - 08/07/2020 Wine on Nine Event at Olive Grove Golf Course
 - 09/12/2020 Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales (1st Sat. after Labor Day)
 - 09/13/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Couples Sunflower Classic
 - 10/09/2020 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
 - 10/10/2020 Pumpkin Fest (Saturday before Columbus Day)
 - 10/31/2020 Downtown Trick or Treat
 - 10/31/2020 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat
 - 11/14/2020 Groton Legion Annual Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
 - 11/26/2020 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center
 - 12/05/2020 Olive Grove Golf Course Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
 - 12/05/2020 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services
 - 01/--/2021 83rd Annual Carnival of Silver Skates
-
- Bingo every Wednesday 6:30pm at the American Legion Post #39
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Meat, American Legion Post #39 7pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
 - Groton Lions Club Wheel of Pizza, Jungle Lanes 8pm (Saturday nights November 30th thru April 11th)
-
- All dates are subject to change, check for updates here

News from the Associated Press

SD Lottery

By The Associated Press

PIERRE, S.D. (AP) _ These South Dakota lotteries were drawn Wednesday:

Dakota Cash

02-05-10-21-22

(two, five, ten, twenty-one, twenty-two)

Estimated jackpot: \$55,000

Lotto America

18-25-31-35-42, Star Ball: 9, ASB: 3

(eighteen, twenty-five, thirty-one, thirty-five, forty-two; Star Ball: nine; ASB: three)

Estimated jackpot: \$2.45 million

Mega Millions

Estimated jackpot: \$231 million

Powerball

07-08-35-50-65, Powerball: 20, Power Play: 4

(seven, eight, thirty-five, fifty, sixty-five; Powerball: twenty; Power Play: four)

Estimated jackpot: \$59 million

Noem expecting spike in cases after mass testing event

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem on Wednesday warned that the state may see a spike in confirmed cases of COVID-19 after a mass testing event in Sioux Falls.

The Republican governor said about 2,600 people have been tested this week as part of an effort to get employees from a Smithfield pork processing facility ready to return to work. The plant shut down for more than two weeks after hundreds of employees were sickened by the virus, but some departments opened on Monday.

Noem continues to move the state toward reopening, indicating that some state employees may soon be returning to their offices, even as confirmed cases are likely to spike.

"We do expect to see a big increase in positive cases," Noem said. "Let's remember though, to keep our focus on hospitalization rates."

The governor has argued that the state's hospital capacity should be what determines her approach to the pandemic, and that she will be able to avoid issuing stay-at-home orders while making sure that hospitals are not overwhelmed. She said the National Guard is ready to help in the state's response with temporary hospitals, ambulances and helicopters to transport patients from remote areas.

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia.

Health officials on Wednesday reported five more deaths from COVID-19, along with 58 new confirmed cases. All five deaths were in Minnehaha County, which has seen most of the infections in the state. A total of 2,779 cases of coronavirus have been confirmed statewide, but the actual number of infections is thought to be far higher than the number of confirmed because many people have not been tested and people can be infected without feeling sick.

Health officials reported that most people who have tested positive have recovered, but 29 people have died in South Dakota from COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus.

Oglala Sioux leader charged with driving drunk, threatening

PINE RIDGE, S.D. (AP) — The president of the Oglala Sioux is accused of driving drunk on the tribe's reservation, which is the only one in South Dakota that bans alcohol.

Tribal Attorney General Scott James on Tuesday charged Julian Bear Runner with driving while intoxicated and threatening a man in Manderson last weekend.

Bear Runner, 34, issued a statement Sunday acknowledging his arrest Saturday and saying he was entitled to due process, but he didn't provide details of the arrest. He did not immediately return a call Wednesday seeking comment.

Bear Runner, who was elected tribal president in November 2018, campaigned in favor of the alcohol ban on the Pine Ridge reservation. He talked about a need to prevent drugs and alcohol from reaching the reservation, and advocated for harsher punishments and better treatment for users.

Bear Runner had a blood alcohol content of 0.10% when a tribal officer administered a field sobriety test, according to the criminal complaint.

He also "did display elements of intoxication" when he came into contact with an officer from the tribe's Department of Public Safety, the complaint states. He allegedly had "slurred speech, glossy and blood-shot eyes, smelled like alcohol and had trouble walking," the Rapid City Journal reported.

Bear Runner also is accused of telling a man that he planned to assault him, although it's not clear who was the target of the alleged threat.

He was expected to enter a plea during an arraignment in early June, said James. If convicted, he faces up to six months in jail on each charge, but first-offense DWI charges like Bear Runner's typically result in probation.

JBS resumes operations at Worthington pork plant

WORTHINGTON, Minn. (AP) — JBS USA is resuming operations at its Worthington pork plant after being shut down for two weeks due to a coronavirus outbreak among workers.

JBS USA said it resumed hog slaughtering at the southwestern Minnesota plant with reduced staff on Wednesday. The company plans to resume processing on Thursday and expect operations to normalize over time as absenteeism rates decline.

JBS USA announced April 20 it was suspending operations at the large pork processing plant because of the COVID-19 outbreak. During the shutdown, the plant euthanized hogs for producers faced with too many animals, but now will return to processing rather than euthanizing hogs.

The company has implemented enhanced safety measures and says it coordinated its reopening strategy with union representatives and local, state and federal officials.

President Donald Trump issued an executive order requiring meatpacking plants to remain open during the pandemic.

The Star Tribune reports the Worthington plant is a key buyer of Minnesota hogs and usually slaughters about 21,000 hogs daily.

Over the past two weeks, extensive testing of plant workers has taken place. As of Monday, 490 workers at the Worthington plant had tested positive for COVID-19, according to the Minnesota Department of Health. The plant employs more than 1,800 union workers.

Hundreds evacuated as wildfires rage in Florida Panhandle

PENSACOLA, Fla. (AP) — Firefighters in the Florida Panhandle battled wildfires through the night that have forced hundreds of people to evacuate from their homes, authorities said.

A more than 575-acre fire in Walton County prompted about 500 people to evacuate. Authorities there said multiple structures were lost in the fire, which was 65% contained Thursday morning.

Walton County Sheriff Michael Adkinson said during a late-night news conference that those who were asked to leave their home but had no place to go were sent to South Walton High School.

Another wildfire broke out Monday afternoon in neighboring Santa Rosa County as high winds and low

humidity caused the blaze to expand 10 times in size, the Florida Forest Service said in a statement. The fire started as a prescribed burn but quickly grew out of control, according to The Tampa Bay Times.

The Forest Service said multiple structures have been lost in the 2,000-acre fire in the Santa Rosa County and authorities are recommending residents south of Interstate 10 to evacuate. The agency did not make clear how many people have been evacuated from the area. So far, about 20% of the fire has been contained, authorities said.

The evacuation order will remain in effect until noon Thursday and then will be reevaluated at that time, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services said in a statement.

"This is an extremely dangerous and fast-moving wildfire situation that is evolving rapidly, so everyone in the affected area should follow directions from state and local officials," said Florida Agriculture Commissioner Nikki Fried.

Almost all of Florida has had less-than-usual rainfall this year. National Weather Service meteorologist Jack Cullen told The Times the dryness helped fuel the fires Wednesday. Cullen, who is based in Mobile, Alabama, said the wind is the real culprit.

"What made this (fire) today was the wind, to go along with the dry conditions and low humidity," Cullen said of the fire near Pensacola.

There have been no reports of injuries or deaths.

Fractures in many nations widen as virus lockdowns ease

By **JILL LAWLESS, ANGELA CHARLTON and ELAINE KURTENBACH** Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Regional and political fractures are emerging in many nations over how fast to lift the lid on coronavirus-imposed lockdowns, as worries about economic devastation collide with fears of a second wave of deaths.

French mayors are resisting the government's call to reopen schools, but Italian governors want Rome to ease lockdown measures faster. As the British government looks to reopen the economy, Scottish leader Nicola Sturgeon has warned that acting too fast could let the virus wreak havoc again.

Sturgeon cautioned that "for the moment we do need to stick with the current lockdown restrictions."

Britain — the European country hit hardest by the pandemic — is expected to extend its nationwide lockdown on Thursday, but hopes cautiously to ease some restrictions on economic and social activity next week.

Restrictions allowing people to leave home only for essential errands, shopping and exercise were imposed in the U.K. on March 23. They are expected to remain in place at least until Sunday, when Prime Minister Boris Johnson plans to set out a roadmap for "phase two" of the outbreak.

The U.K. government has said gradual loosening measures will include more road space to walk and cycle while maintaining social distancing, and encouragement for sectors including construction to get back to work.

The U.K.'s official COVID-19 death toll stands at 30,076, second only to the United States. Johnson's government is facing intense criticism for its about-face on coronavirus testing and contact tracing — abandoned in March but now a priority — and failure to ensure a steady supply of personal protective equipment to medics.

In France, more than 300 mayors in the Paris region have urged President Emmanuel Macron to delay the reopening of schools scheduled for Monday. Many mayors around the country have already refused to reopen schools, and many parents will keep their children at home even where they are functioning again.

The mayors called the timing "untenable and unrealistic," saying they were put on a "forced march" to get schools ready without enough staff or equipment, and complained that the government guidelines were too vague and slow in coming.

But governments are also under pressure to reopen faster and kick-start economies that have been plunged into hibernation.

Italian regional governors are pressing to open shops and restaurants, just days after the country began

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 19 of 66

easing its two-month lockdown, allowing 4.5 million people to return to work in offices and factories.

Governors are seeking to be allowed to present their own plans for reopening, tailored to the rate of infection and economic needs of their regions.

In Germany, whose 16 state governments are responsible for imposing and loosening lockdowns, some governors have been more impatient than others to open up businesses such as restaurants and hotels.

At a meeting Wednesday with Chancellor Angela Merkel, it was agreed that state leaders would have wide leeway to decide when to open more sectors of the economy. They also will have to reimpose restrictions locally if coronavirus infections rebound.

In Russia, where the number of new infections is growing fast, President Vladimir Putin delegated the enforcement of lockdowns and other restrictions to regional governments, leading to wide variations across the country.

Mikhail Vinogradov, head of the St. Petersburg Politics think tank, told the Vedomosti newspaper that the Moscow government was sending mixed messages that governors find hard to decipher — wanting a victory over the virus, while also encouraging easing of the lockdown.

Fractures are also evident in the U.S., where about half of the 50 states are easing their shutdowns, to the alarm of public health officials.

Many states have not put in place the robust testing and contact tracing that experts believe is necessary to detect and contain new outbreaks. And many governors have pressed ahead with reopening before their states have met one of the key benchmarks in the administration's guidelines for reopening — a 14-day downward trajectory in new infections.

"If we relax these measures without having the proper public health safeguards in place, we can expect many more cases and, unfortunately, more deaths," said Josh Michaud, associate director of global health policy with the Kaiser Family Foundation in Washington.

Researchers recently doubled their projection of deaths in the U.S. to about 134,000 through early August. So far the U.S. has recorded over 70,000 deaths and 1.2 million confirmed infections.

Worldwide, the virus has infected more than 3.6 million people and killed over a quarter-million, according to a Johns Hopkins University tally, which experts agree understates the dimensions of the pandemic because of limited testing, differences in counting the dead and concealment by some governments.

Europe and North America are looking nervously to Asian nations that are well on the way to reopening.

China, where the virus emerged late last year, reported just two new cases on Thursday, both from overseas, and said the whole country now is at low risk of further infections after confirming no new deaths from COVID-19 in more than three weeks.

China also fired back against claims by U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo that there is "enormous evidence" that the coronavirus originated in a Chinese laboratory.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Hua Chunying accused Pompeo of "making up lies and covering up a lie by fabricating more lies."

Strict social distancing also appears to have vanquished the outbreak in the remote island nation of New Zealand, where Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern outlined plans for further relaxing lockdown rules, with a decision coming perhaps next week.

New Zealand would keep its borders shut, restrict gatherings to 100 people or fewer and hold professional sports events without spectators. Masks and other precautions would be required as restaurants and schools reopen, she said. But Ardern called for vigilance.

"We think of ourselves as halfway down Everest," Ardern said. "I think it's clear that no one wants to hike back up that peak."

US jobless claims set to surge again before April jobs data

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government is set Thursday to release another dire picture of the layoffs that have pummeled America's workforce, one day before it will issue what is sure to be the worst monthly

jobs report since record-keeping began seven decades ago.

The Labor Department will likely announce that several million more people filed for unemployment benefits last week, after more than 30 million sought aid in the previous six weeks after the coronavirus forced employers across the country to close.

Most nonessential businesses remain shut down, though a majority of states are beginning to ease restrictions for some categories of companies despite concerns that it may be too soon to do so without accelerating new infections.

For the April jobs report coming Friday, economists are forecasting at least 21 million job losses and an unemployment rate of 16 percent or more — the highest rate since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

5 things to know today - that aren't about the virus

By The Associated Press

Your daily look at nonvirus stories in the news:

1. WILDFIRES RAGE IN FLORIDA PANHANDLE Forecasters say dry conditions, low humidity and high winds have whipped up the fire which started as a prescribed burn, forcing hundreds of people from their homes.

2. 'PEOPLE FELT BREATHLESS' A chemical gas leak from an industrial plant in southern India has killed at least 11 people and left about 1,000 others suffering with breathing difficulties and other problems.

3. CARDINAL PELL KNEW OF ABUSIVE PRIESTS An Australian inquiry says the prelate knew a priest had been moved decades ago because he had sexually abused children and should have suspended an unstable priest in another parish.

4. WHO'S SUDDENLY CHATTY Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who once went 10 years without asking a question in court, has been an active questioner for three straight days.

5. FAVRE REPAYING STATE FOR NO-SHOW SPEECHES The Hall of Fame quarterback is repaying \$1.1 million in welfare money that he received for multiple speeches where he did not show up, the Mississippi state auditor says.

Chemical leak at LG plant in India kills 11, about 1,000 ill

By OMER FAROOQ Associated Press

HYDERABAD, India (AP) — A gas leaked from an LG chemical plant in southern India early Thursday, leaving people struggling to breathe and collapsing in the streets as they tried to flee. At least 11 people died and about 1,000 suffered breathing difficulties and other problems.

The synthetic chemical styrene leaked from the LG Polymers plant in a city on India's eastern coast while workers were preparing to restart the facility after a coronavirus lockdown was eased, state official Vinay Chand said.

A fire that broke out before the gas leak was extinguished, and police said the gas leak was later halted and the air had cleared.

Chand said some people collapsed on the road and were rushed to a hospital. About 1,000 people in an area of 3 kilometres (1.8 miles) complained of breathing difficulties and a burning sensation in their eyes, he said.

About 100 people were hospitalized and in non-life-threatening condition, Police Commissioner R.K. Meena said.

S.N. Pradhan, chief of the National Disaster Response Force, said 11 people had died.

The dead included an 8-year-old girl. Meena said one person died after falling into a well while running away and another person died after jumping from the second story of his house to escape. The others died in a hospital.

State Industries Minister Mekapati Goutham Reddy said rescuers broke open the doors of village homes which were locked from the inside and found some people who had collapsed and transported them to

a hospital.

South Korean company LG Chem Ltd. operates the plant in Vishakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh state. It says it is South Korea's largest chemical company and is part of the LG Corp. conglomerate.

The company said it is cooperating with Indian authorities to help residents and employees.

"The gas leakage is now under control, but the leaked gas can cause nausea and dizziness, so we are investing every effort to ensure proper treatment is provided swiftly," LG Chem said in a statement.

It is looking into the cause of the leak of styrene monomer gas, which is used to produce plastic, but won't know exactly until Indian authorities complete their investigation, company official Song Chun-seob said.

The Vishakhapatnam plant is a leading manufacturer of polystyrene plastic in India. It employs around 300 workers, but Song said the victims appeared mostly to be local residents.

Mekapati Goutham Sawang, the state director-general of police, said styrene gas "is not a poisonous or a lethal gas."

"Only if one inhales high doses of it, it is serious. Otherwise, it leads to irritation, losing coherence and breathlessness," he said.

Authorities deployed 25 ambulances to move the victims to hospitals and others away from the accident site.

Meena said about 3,000 people were evacuated from a village near the plant.

Images from television showed people lying in the streets after they collapsed while trying to flee.

A witness said there was panic as a mist-like gas enveloped the area. "People felt breathless in their homes and tried to run away. Darkness added to the confusion," he told a television channel. His name wasn't given by the channel.

India imposed a strict nationwide lockdown on March 25 to control the spread of the coronavirus. Measures were eased on Monday, allowing neighborhood shops and factories to resume activities.

India has reported about 50,000 virus cases and 1,694 deaths.

In a major industrial disaster in India in 1984, at least 2,850 people were killed and 20,000 injured when methyl isocyanate gas leaked from a tank at Union Carbide India Ltd.'s Bhopal plant in central India.

Face masks make a political statement in era of coronavirus

By WILL WEISSERT and JONATHAN LEMIRE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The decision to wear a mask in public is becoming a political statement — a moment to pick sides in a brewing culture war over containing the coronavirus.

While not yet as loaded as a "Make America Great Again" hat, the mask is increasingly a visual shorthand for a debate pitting those willing to follow health officials' guidance and cover their faces against those who feel it violates their freedom or buys into a threat they think is overblown.

That resistance is fueled by some of the same people who object to other virus restrictions. The push back has been stoked by President Donald Trump — he didn't wear a mask during a Tuesday appearance at a facility making them — and some other Republicans, who have flouted rules and questioned the value of masks. It's a development that has worried experts as Americans are increasingly returning to public spaces.

"There's such a strong culture of individualism that, even if it's going to help protect them, people don't want the government telling them what to do," said Linsey Marr, a Virginia Tech engineering professor with experience in airborne transmission of viruses.

Inconclusive science and shifting federal guidance have no doubt muddied the political debate. Health officials initially said wearing masks was unnecessary, especially amid a shortage of protective materials. But last month, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention began recommending wearing cloth masks in public to prevent transmitting the virus to others.

Whether Americans are embracing the change may depend on their political party. While most other protective measures like social distancing get broad bipartisan support, Democrats are more likely than Republicans to say they're wearing a mask when leaving home, 76% to 59%, according to a recent poll

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 22 of 66

by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The split is clear across several demographics that lean Democratic. People with college degrees are more likely than those without to wear masks when leaving home, 78% to 63%. African Americans are more likely than either white people or Hispanic Americans to say they're wearing masks outside the home, 83% to 64% and 67%, respectively.

The notable exception is among older people, a group particularly vulnerable to serious illness from the virus. Some 79% of those age 60 and over were doing so compared with 63% of those younger.

"Who knows what the truth is on masks?" asked Republican Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, who, unlike some of his colleagues, went without a mask Tuesday in the Senate. Paul already contracted the virus and believes he is no longer contagious.

His comments were a long way from New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo's moral argument for the mask a few days earlier.

"How people cannot wear masks — that to me is even disrespectful," Cuomo said. "You put so many people at risk because you did not want to wear a mask?"

Effectiveness aside, politicians of both parties are clued into the powerful symbolism of the mask, and many Americans take their cues from the president.

Trump was barefaced when he spoke to masked journalists, workers and Secret Service agents at the Arizona factory Tuesday. He later said he briefly wore a mask backstage but took it off because facility personnel told him he didn't need it.

But Trump has been mask averse for weeks. Within minutes of the CDC announcing its updated mask recommendations, he said, "I don't think that I'm going to be doing it."

Trump has told advisers that he believes wearing one would "send the wrong message," according to one administration and two campaign officials not authorized to publicly discuss private conversations. The president said doing so would make it seem like he is preoccupied with health instead of focused on reopening the nation's economy — which his aides believe is the key to his reelection chances in November.

Moreover, Trump, who is known to be especially cognizant of his appearance on television, has also told confidants that he fears he would look ridiculous in a mask and the image would appear in negative ads, according to one of the officials.

"It's a vanity thing, I guess, with him," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said of Trump on MSNBC. "You'd think, as the president of the United States, you would have the confidence to honor the guidance he's giving the country."

That's left those around him unsure of how to proceed. White House aides say the president hasn't told them not to wear them, but few do. Some Republican allies have asked Trump's campaign how it would be viewed by the White House if they were spotted wearing a mask, according to two campaign officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss private conversations.

Meanwhile, Trump's reelection campaign has ordered red Trump-branded masks for supporters and is considering giving them away at events or in return for donations. But some advisers are concerned the president will later sour on the idea, according to one campaign official.

That uncertainty was on display last week, when Vice President Mike Pence went maskless at the Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. He later acknowledged he should have worn one and did use a mask during a subsequent trip to a ventilator plant.

The issue has been far less fraught for Democrats, whose presumptive presidential nominee, Joe Biden, has said he wears a mask when interacting with the Secret Service.

Dilemmas for politicians and other Americans are only going to increase as parts of the country begin easing stay-at-home orders and businesses reopen with new rules. The tensions have already flared in Michigan, where a man was shot and killed over a mask dispute at a store.

One of the earliest communities to require masks in public was Laredo, Texas. A \$1,000 noncompliance fine was negated by an order from the governor, but Mayor Pete Saenz said his community is still asking citizens to comply so hospitals aren't overtaxed with new cases.

"We don't want to violate anyone's civil liberties," Saenz said. But "we can't help you, if it's beyond our medical capacity, whether you exercise your civil liberties or not."

AP Exclusive: Admin shelves CDC guide to reopening country

By JASON DEAREN and MIKE STOBBE Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (AP) — A set of detailed documents created by the nation's top disease investigators meant to give step-by-step advice to local leaders deciding when and how to reopen public places such as mass transit, day care centers and restaurants during the still-raging pandemic has been shelved by the Trump administration.

The 17-page report by a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention team, titled "Guidance for Implementing the Opening Up America Again Framework," was researched and written to help faith leaders, business owners, educators and state and local officials as they begin to reopen.

It was supposed to be published last Friday, but agency scientists were told the guidance "would never see the light of day," according to a CDC official. The official was not authorized to talk to reporters and spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity.

The AP obtained a copy from a second federal official who was not authorized to release it. The guidance was described in AP stories last week, prior to the White House decision to shelve it.

The Trump administration has been closely controlling the release of guidance and information during the pandemic spurred by a new coronavirus that scientists are still trying to understand, with the president himself leading freewheeling daily briefings until last week.

Traditionally, it's been the CDC's role to give the public and local officials guidance and science-based information during public health crises. During this one, however, the CDC has not had a regular, pandemic-related news briefing in nearly two months. CDC Director Dr. Robert Redfield has been a member of the White House coronavirus task force, but largely absent from public appearances.

The dearth of real-time, public information from the nation's experts has struck many current and former government health officials as dangerous.

"CDC has always been the public health agency Americans turn to in a time of crisis," said Dr. Howard Koh, a Harvard professor and former health official in the Obama administration during the H1N1 swine flu pandemic in 2009. "The standard in a crisis is to turn to them for the latest data and latest guidance and the latest press briefing. That has not occurred, and everyone sees that."

The Trump administration has instead sought to put the onus on states to handle COVID-19 response. This approach to managing the pandemic has been reflected in President Donald Trump's public statements, from the assertion that he isn't responsible for the country's lackluster early testing efforts, to his description last week of the federal government's role as a "supplier of last resort" for states in need of testing aid.

White House spokeswoman Kayleigh McEnany echoed that at a briefing Wednesday. "We've consulted individually with states, but as I said, it's (a) governor-led effort. It's a state-led effort on ... which the federal government will consult. And we do so each and every day."

The rejected reopening guidance was described by one of the federal officials as a touchstone document that was to be used as a blueprint for other groups inside the CDC who are creating the same type of instructional materials for other facilities.

The guidance contained detailed advice for making site-specific decisions related to reopening schools, restaurants, summer camps, churches, day care centers and other institutions. It had been widely shared within CDC, and included detailed "decision trees," flow charts to be used by local officials to think through different scenarios. One page of the document can be found on the CDC website via search engines, but it did not appear to be linked to any other CDC pages.

Some of the report's suggestions already appear on federal websites. But the guidance offered specific, tailored recommendations for reopening in one place.

For example, the report suggested restaurants and bars should install sneeze guards at cash registers

and avoid having buffets, salad bars and drink stations. Similar tips appear on the CDC's site and a Food and Drug Administration page.

But the shelved report also said that as restaurants start seating diners again, they should space tables at least 6 feet apart and try to use phone app technology to alert a patron when their table is ready to avoid touching and use of "buzzers." That's not on the CDC's site now.

"You can say that restaurants can open and you need to follow social distancing guidelines. But restaurants want to know, 'What does that look like?' States would like more guidance," said Dr. Marcus Plescia, chief medical officer of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials.

The White House's own "Opening Up America Again" guidelines released last month were more vague than the CDC's unpublished report. They instructed state and local governments to reopen in accordance with federal and local "regulations and guidance," and to monitor employees for symptoms of COVID-19. The White House guidance also included advice developed earlier in the pandemic that remains important like social distancing and encouraging working from home.

A person close to the White House's coronavirus task force said the CDC documents were never cleared by CDC leadership for public release. The person said that White House officials don't want to offer detailed guidance for how specific sectors can reopen, calling it a "slippery slope" because the virus is affecting various parts of the country differently.

CDC is hearing daily from state and county health departments looking for scientifically valid information with which to make informed decisions.

Still, behind the scenes, CDC scientists like those who produced the guidance for "Opening Up America Again" are working to get information to local governments. The agency still employs hundreds of the world's most respected epidemiologists and doctors, who in times of crisis are looked to for their expertise, said former CDC director Tom Frieden. People have clicked on the CDC's coronavirus website more than 1.2 billion times.

States that directly reach out to the CDC can tap guidance that's been prepared, but that the White House has not released yet.

"I don't think that any state feels that the CDC is deficient. It's just the process of getting stuff out," Plescia said.

Foreigners on the frontlines of pandemic in Arab Gulf states

By AYA BATRAWY Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — As she was treated for COVID-19 in a hospital isolation ward in Kuwait City, Amnah Ibraheem wanted to credit those caring for her. The nurses were all South Asian, the radiologist was African, another of her doctors was Egyptian. The only fellow Kuwaiti she saw, briefly, was a lone volunteer.

Ibraheem pointed this out on Twitter, in a rejoinder to some voices in Kuwait and other parts of the Gulf who have stoked fear and resentment of foreigners, blaming them for the spread of the coronavirus.

"We can't decide right now to be racist and to say that expats are free-riders, because they're not," the 32-year-old political scientist and mother of two told The Associated Press. "They're the ones working on our health right now, completely holding our health system together."

The global pandemic has drawn attention to just how vital foreigners are to the Arab Gulf countries where they work, particularly as countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Oman expel foreigners from certain sectors to create jobs for their own citizens. The crisis has also shed a brief light on the systemic inequality in their home countries that drives so many to the region in the first place.

Across the Gulf countries, the workers on the front lines are uniquely almost entirely foreigners, whether it's in a hospital in Saudi Arabia, an isolation ward in Kuwait or a grocery store in the United Arab Emirates. They carry out the essential work, risking exposure to the novel coronavirus, often with the added strain of being far from family.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 25 of 66

Foreigners also make up the vast majority of the roughly 78,000 confirmed coronavirus cases overall in the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain Oman and Saudi Arabia.

In the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Bahrain, foreigners also make up the vast majority of the population. Most hail from India, Pakistan, Nepal, the Philippines and Egypt. They reside on temporary work visas with no path to citizenship, no matter how long they've lived or worked in the Gulf. Many work low-paying construction jobs and live in labor camps where up to 10 people share a room. These living conditions have made them vulnerable to the fast-spreading disease known as COVID-19.

That has made them a target for some. Popular Kuwaiti actress Hayat al-Fahad told a Kuwaiti broadcaster the root of the country's coronavirus problem lies in South Asian and Egyptian migrant workers. She lamented that if their own countries won't take them back, why should Kuwait fill its hospitals to treat them at the expense of its own citizens.

"Aren't people supposed to leave during crises?" she said, before adding: "I swear by God, put them in the desert. I am not against humane treatment, but we have gotten to a point where we're fed up already."

Ibraheem said her tweet was in response to such rhetoric. Kuwait, she said, has always been a moderate, welcoming country built with help from expatriates.

"This is the not the time to become tribalistic," Ibraheem said. "This is the time to work together with everybody because the virus doesn't check your passport."

From the same hospital, Najeeba Hayat used Instagram to take aim at Kuwaiti lawmaker Saffa al-Hashem after she called for the deportation of foreigners who'd overstayed their visas in order to "purify the country" of the virus they might transmit.

"I take umbrage to that," Hayat told the AP. "There's no way we can survive if we continue to look down on the very people taking care of us, who have raised our children, who are part of the fabric of our community."

Hayat spent more than 30 days in the hospital until she was cleared of COVID-19. On the day she left, she shared photos with her more than 25,000 followers of her Indian nurses, thanking them for being on the front line with her.

While foreign doctors and nurses have received some praise in local media, farther from the spotlight are the delivery men, street cleaners, construction workers, butchers and cashiers who also risk exposure to the virus in their jobs.

At the Carrefour supermarket in Dubai, plexiglass shields at the registers protect the cashiers, and everyone entering is required to wear gloves and a mask.

One cashier, Valaney Fernandes, a 27-year-old from Goa, India, who's been working in the UAE the past five years, said she felt she was contributing. "It's like in hospitals and everywhere, they are serving there as much as they can."

Fernandes said she was grateful to still be working. Her retired parents back home rely on her salary. "We have to earn for our daily needs," she said. "I'm lucky enough to work now. I'm really lucky."

Tens of thousands of migrant workers who've lost their jobs have demanded from their embassies in the Gulf to be flown back home amid the pandemic. In the UAE alone, local media reported that more than 197,000 Indians registered their details with the Indian government to return home.

When the UAE shuttered movie theaters in March, Ugandan Lukia Namitala came close to losing her job at Vox Cinema, but parent company Majid Al Futtaim quickly redeployed her and some 1,000 other employees to their Carrefour supermarket division to help with a surge in demand.

"The majority of my friends, they are no longer working," she said. Now she's an essential worker, stocking shelves.

To be so far from family has been hard, she said. Namitala had to postpone her annual leave last month due to the pandemic, and missed her daughter's fifth birthday. As she thought about another missed milestone, her eyes welled up with tears.

"The best thing in this world is staying next to your family," she said. "If I get my savings nicely, I'm ready to go back and stay with my family because my family is my everything."

In a nod to how important foreigners are to the economy, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohammed bin

Zayed said in a video he was moved to tears watching foreign residents on social media sing the UAE's national anthem.

"May God protect you, protect the country you're in, which you are loyal to like its own citizens," he said in late March.

French teens, Normandy vets swap stories of life in lockdown

By **DANICA KIRKA** and **ALEX TURNBULL** Associated Press

CABOURG, France (AP) — French student Marion Nivard started writing last year to a World War II veteran in Britain, thanking him for taking part in the Normandy invasion that freed her country from the Nazis.

As VE Day approached, Nivard and her classmates in the Normandy region thought of 94-year-old Bill Ridgewell and other vets living in isolation because of the COVID-19 pandemic — just as they were. The teens decided to swap stories with the men about their lives under lockdown.

"I think we need to be with them even if we're not with them — if that makes sense!" said Nivard, 15. "It's already something to be there in thoughts and sending them messages. I'm sure it makes them happy, and it makes us happy too."

The effort to share snippets of lockdown life comes at a time of disappointment for the veterans, most of whom are now in their 90s. They were looking forward to a grand party on Friday marking the 75th anniversary of the end of the war in Europe. Nationwide celebrations would have placed them in the spotlight.

But the festivities have been scaled back to mostly broadcast events, including a two-minute moment of silence. Queen Elizabeth II will deliver a televised message, and there will be a national singalong of "We'll Meet Again," led by 103-year-old Vera Lynn, who made the song famous during the war.

Writing to the veterans brought home to the teens that they are living through a unique moment in time that will be remembered by future generations, said Mayeul Macé, a history teacher at Saint-Louis Middle School in Cabourg. President Emmanuel Macron's address announcing the lockdown set the stage.

"The president's use of the term 'at war' really left its mark on the pupils," he said. "I have students who wonder what history really is, and they realized that they were experiencing something historic."

The relationships with the vets began in 2017, when a group of them spoke at the school. The teens gave the guests vials of sand or soil, depending on whether they stormed the Normandy beaches or dropped from planes. The students later visited the Imperial War Museum in London, and the veterans came too. Ties formed, and letters were exchanged, said Ian Parsons, chairman of the Taxi Charity for Military Veterans, which arranged the school visit.

"That's the paramount thing," Parsons said. "They know they aren't on their own when something comes through that letter box."

Veterans like hearing the kids talk about lockdown in all its banality. Snapshots of lunch, happy dogs on walks and bedrooms tidied briefly for photos are standard fare. Content is secondary.

Just ask Ridgewell.

A former school headmaster, Ridgewell was in a trench on the outskirts of Caen on July 5, 1944, when he watched Allied planes bomb the city. He was horrified and feared the French would never forgive the Allies for laying waste to their communities, even though the bombing was part of the effort to crush the Nazis.

He was so concerned about the French reaction that for years he did not want to visit Normandy. But he finally returned last year as part of celebrations marking the 75th anniversary of D-Day. What he found surprised him: The French treated him like a hero.

"They gave us freedom, and they fought for our future. And to be grateful is the least we can do," Nivard said.

The students did more than stay in touch. Ridgewell's pen pal and another girl from a nearby school traveled to England last year to watch him receive the Legion D'Honneur, France's highest military and civilian decoration. He's quick to show off a cherished snapshot of the event.

He keeps his sand vials beside his armchair. He is even creating a wall of photographs to celebrate his new friendships.

Now the man who was reluctant to go to France can't wait to go back and catch up with the teens. He wishes he could adopt them all.

To show he's in the spirit of all things lockdown, Ridgewell had his daughter, Mary, take videos of him around the house. There's one in the front garden, another in the back garden and one in the kitchen on a rainy day. In that one, you can see the old schoolteacher at work: He identifies everything — this is the microwave! — so the kids can work on their English.

Not content to leave it there, Ridgewell has taken up studying French so he can talk to "mes amis."

The children started writing to express their gratitude. Now it's his turn.

The exchanges "let daylight into this dark time of lockdown," he told The Associated Press from his home in Shaftesbury, in southern England. "It's been brilliant. Grateful? That's an understatement really. I'm more than grateful! I'm delighted."

Leningrad siege survivor supplies needy amid pandemic

By IRINA TITOVA Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (AP) — As a child during the World War II siege of Leningrad, Galina Yakovleva learned how to make the best of fearful times. Today she's using those lessons as she brings food and supplies to needy people locked down in the coronavirus pandemic.

The 80-year-old drives a white minivan every day through the city, now named St. Petersburg, on a one-woman charitable mission for the elderly and needy families with children. She's been doing this for a decade and hasn't let the virus deter her.

"I'm not afraid of it; I drive my van alone," she said. "My soul does not let me leave all my people in need without attention."

"I have arrangements with certain food stores and grocery depots on certain dates of the month. So if I don't pick up what I am to get, that food will get spoiled and people who need it won't get it."

Wasting food is abhorrent to someone who went through the privations of the 1941-44 siege, when the city came under bombardment from Nazi forces, supply lines were cut off and some 800,000 civilians died.

"We never threw away anything. ... How can you throw away bread?" she said.

The kindergarten she attended was bombarded, forcing her and some other children to hide in a cast iron pipe. The shock was so great that she didn't speak for year afterward, she says.

In adulthood, Yakovleva held several jobs in which she learned skills that she now uses to collect and distribute aid: She variously drove a tractor, an ambulance and a trolley bus.

Yakovleva organized her Dobrota (Kindness) Foundation about 10 years ago to help socially disadvantaged people. She built connections with the city food stores, bakeries, farms and even theaters.

The operation is a lifeline for more than 500 people.

Her activities haven't changed much during the pandemic, except for some adjustments in picking up and delivering the goods. Men now load her van without direct contact with her and she sometimes leaves her deliveries at a doorstep.

But many of her care recipients still open the door for her and want to communicate.

"I don't know how I'd live here indoors for a month if not for Galina. She brings me milk, bread, everything so I won't die from hunger", said Lyubov Travkina, 83. "I'm amazed. This person lives only for others, not for herself."

"We should always think of helping others, at least a bit. Not just lie on the sofa," Yakovleva said.

Women demand voice in Italy virus response dominated by men

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — Every evening when health experts updated anxious Italians in televised briefings about their nation's devastating coronavirus outbreak, the lineup of authoritative figures included only one woman: the sign-language interpreter.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 28 of 66

And not a single woman was among the 20-member commission appointed to advise the government on how and when Italy could safely re-open its factories, stores, schools and parks — a disparity all the more glaring because more than half the country's doctors and three-quarters of its nurses are women, many on the heroic front lines of the pandemic.

Not to mention that the three researchers who isolated the coronavirus in the first days of Italy's outbreak were women.

Indignation over the gender inequality has now exploded into the open, with some 70 female researchers and scientists signing a petition demanding the government include women in virus decision-making bodies as a matter of "democracy and civilization."

Backing them is a grass-roots movement on social media dubbed "give us voice" — a riff on the token presence of the silent female sign-language interpreter at the news conferences.

A motion has also been lodged in the Senate by 16 female lawmakers calling on the government to remedy the imbalance. Dozens of women in Parliament's lower Chamber of Deputies backed a similar motion, behind slogans like, "Let's make ourselves heard."

This week Premier Giuseppe Conte acknowledged the appeals, calling on the head of the commission of scientific and technical experts advising the government on reopening to enlist women into their ranks. He urged his Cabinet ministers to "keep gender equilibrium in mind" in setting up task forces.

"We're happy to have contributed to repairing a glaring error," said Sen. Emma Bonino, who has battled for decades in Italy for women's rights.

But Italian women's concerns are looking beyond pandemic panels. Women are worried that the closure of schools until at least September, coupled with cultural attitudes stacked in favor of men, will set them even farther behind in the workforce.

According to 2018 European Union figures, 53% of Italian women were in their nation's workforce, compared with 73% for men. Only Greece ranked lower among EU nations: 49% for women and 70% for men.

Scarcity of affordable day care and men's rejection of domestic roles including housework have been blamed for decades for Italian women's inability or reluctance to join the workforce.

When Conte explained to the nation how Italy would gradually emerge from lockdown, "he never said the words, 'family, children, school,' until a journalist asked him," noted Irene Fellin, a senior researcher on gender and security at the International Affairs Institute, a Rome-based think tank.

Conte's lack of focus on the childcare burden posed for women in the months ahead is "one of the reasons it was so important to have a woman on the commission" advising the government on reopening, said Dr. Paola Romagnani, a kidney specialist who signed the petition calling for women's inclusion and spoke with the international media in Rome on Tuesday.

In some European countries, like Sweden, middle and elementary schools as well as nursery schools have remained open during the pandemic. In France, heavily stricken by COVID-19, the government is preparing for a staggered reopening of schools starting next week, when the country's lockdown starts being eased.

"I'm sadly sure that in the short term there will be damage" to women's slow progress in the Italian labor market, said Valeria Poli, a molecular biologist at the University of Turin, who also signed the petition. She expressed dismay that in 25 years the female presence in the Italian workforce has grown only 8%.

"If couples have to decide who goes back to work when they reopen the offices, it will be the women who won't go back," since many women work part-time or are paid less than men, said Fellin, who also heads the Italian branch of Women in International Security.

As to why women were snubbed for visible roles during the pandemic, Romagnani pointed to the country's centuries-old culture that attributes authoritative to men. As part of this legacy, until the early 1960s, women in Italy weren't allowed to hold top positions at public companies, she noted.

Fellin agreed. "I don't think that they think women aren't competent. They just don't see them," she said.

Pandemic poses special threat to indigenous health, culture

By VICTORIA MILKO AP Science Writer

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — In Indonesia's easternmost province, felled trees are stacked to block a road that leads to Papuan villages. On the Thai-Myanmar border, the Karen people have also made makeshift barricades and marked them with signs warning visitors away.

Across the globe, the coronavirus pandemic has left indigenous peoples at particular risk because so many have poorer health and less access to health care than their non-indigenous peers.

While there are, of course, vast differences among indigenous groups, including lifestyle and socio-economic factors, the United Nations estimates that the life expectancy of indigenous people can be up to 20 years lower than that of their counterparts. A recommendation from the Australian government underscored the disparities. A message sent in March warned: "People over aged 70, ages over 60 with preexisting conditions, or Indigenous people aged over 50 should stay home whenever possible for their own protection."

The more stringent recommendation for indigenous people is likely because so many have the kinds of health problems that experts say can result in more serious consequences if they contract the coronavirus.

According to U.N. data, more than half of indigenous adults over 35 worldwide have Type 2 diabetes. Indigenous people also experience "disproportionately high levels" of cardiovascular disease, HIV/AIDS and illnesses such as tuberculosis.

For most people, the virus causes mild or moderate symptoms. But for some, especially those with health problems and older people, it can cause more severe illness and lead to death.

Genetics may play a part in poorer health among indigenous people, Mason Durie, a professor of Māori Studies at Massey University who is himself Māori, but social factors are generally considered more important.

Aware of the added risks, many indigenous people — especially those living near or in urban centers — are seeking isolation, said Rudolph Rýser, an indigenous activist and executive director of the Center for World Indigenous Studies.

"Many people that are able to are simply running back into the forest, running back up the mountain, trying to get away from the urban settings to get away from potential vectors," he said. "They simply closed down, put up obstacles, and block the roads going into their territories."

That has raised the possibility that members who don't typically live in traditional villages could bring the disease back with them. And some communities, like aboriginal ones in Australia, may be ill equipped to keep people safe because of poor infrastructure and crowding in homes, said Dr. Mark Wenitong, an aboriginal general practitioner and adviser to aboriginal health councils in Australia.

Some indigenous communities are practicing social distancing that closely resembles what's happening outside them. In Indonesia, groups including Papuans and the Buntao' in South Sulawesi province are blocking access to their villages. Elsewhere, others, like the Karen people, are also adding in traditional practices, such as performing rituals to remove bad luck or marking village entrances with culturally significant symbols.

While many marginalized groups are finding themselves at risk, the stakes may be even higher for indigenous people who were already struggling to maintain their traditions and keep the world at bay, like those in the Amazon rainforest who have long contended with encroachment on their lands by loggers, miners and farmers.

The disease poses a serious risk, but restrictions to curtail the pandemic are also threatening the way of life of some groups and disrupting important cultural practices for others.

In Uganda, the military is trying to prevent the Batwa, who are going hungry under lockdown, from slipping across the border into Rwanda to get food from relatives, said Faith Tushabe, who works with a local NGO. Long evicted from their forest homes, the Batwa usually trade labor for food — and can't right now.

Restrictions on movement have also made it difficult for some of the Mbororo — semi-nomadic pastoralists in Cameroon — to survive, said Sali Django, a program coordinator for Mboscuda, a non-governmental group that supports the Mbororo.

"They need to look for food to eat," he said.

The Maasai, a semi-nomadic indigenous group in Kenya and Tanzania, meanwhile, have been forced to halt important rituals that bring clans together, including the graduation of warriors into young men who can marry and own property.

The outbreak is forcing major changes, said Benjamin Timaiyio, a Maasai youth leader.

"It will totally interfere with culture and tradition — and we are living through culture and tradition," he said.

While some countries have earmarked emergency funds to help indigenous peoples, the virus still poses a major threat, said Rukka Sombolinggi, general secretary of the Indigenous People Alliance of the Archipelago (AMAN) in Indonesia.

"They could become extinct," she said. "Not only the people, but also their culture."

Lives Lost: Alabama Medal of Honor winner downplayed heroism

By JAY REEVES Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Decades after the Vietnam War, retired Army Command Sgt. Maj. Bennie Adkins had a simple way of explaining how he survived mortar attacks and rifle bullets that killed so many people all around him.

"It was not my day," he'd say.

Then the coronavirus found Adkins and felled its first Medal of Honor recipient on April 17.

Adkins, 86, was an Alabama war hero who returned home to become an accountant, teach night courses to adults trying to better themselves and launch a nonprofit foundation awarding scholarships to veterans.

The resident of the small city of Opelika received the nation's highest military honor from then-President Barack Obama during a 2014 White House ceremony.

While deeply honored and humbled, Adkins deflected attention from his courageous actions fighting off waves of enemy attackers at a strategic point in South Vietnam.

"What I did is not heroic. What I did was ... that was my job. That was what I was trained for. That was I was paid for as a professional soldier and I was trying to do the job in a professional way," Adkins said in an oral history project for the Library of Congress after the award ceremony.

Adkins died three weeks after being admitted to the same hospital where one of his five children, Dr. Keith Adkins, works as a surgeon.

The son said his father was married for 60 years and gave back whatever he could around Opelika, an old railroad town of about 31,000 people near Auburn University, helping others not only in wartime but also at home.

"We want his legacy to be not just what he did in the military," said Keith Adkins, who wasn't involved in his father's care. "We want to show that character that he had and what it led him to do when he was out of the military."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is part of an ongoing series of stories remembering people who have died from coronavirus around the world.

Born on a farm in Oklahoma during the Dust Bowl drought that reduced much of the topsoil in the central U.S. to powder, Adkins was in the middle of seven children.

"We learned to work, we learned to be conservative, and with a large family, we learned to share," he said.

More interested in women than academics after entering college, Adkins dropped out and was soon drafted. He liked the idea of the military as a career but wanted more than an administrative position or regular infantry job. So he applied for the Special Forces, made it through a lengthy training regimen and landed in Vietnam in 1963 for the first of three tours.

About three years later, at age 32, that Adkins fought the battle that brought him a lifetime of accolades.

A sergeant first class at the time, Adkins was in charge of a mortar crew at a U.S. military camp in the

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 31 of 66

A Shau Valley of South Vietnam, near the border with Laos, when the Viet Cong opened fire on March 9, 1966.

He ran through exploding mortar rounds to drag several troops to safety, according to his medal citation, and then exposed himself to sniper fire to carry wounded comrades to medical care.

The main attack came a day later. Though wounded and with most of his crew dead or wounded, Adkins fought off waves of attackers from a mortar pit and then killed many more enemy troops from a communications bunker. Adkins suffered 18 wounds - including to an eye and his torso - but killed at least 135 enemy troops.

During the battle, Adkins recounted, bullets hit and killed a wounded man he was carrying on his back to safety. At another point, Adkins, a one-time baseball catcher, snagged a North Vietnamese hand grenade in mid-air another time and hurled it back at the enemy.

Finally ordered to evacuate the camp, Adkins escaped with a few others into the jungle and they were rescued two days later by a helicopter. That ending might have been much different - but for a tiger that was also in the jungle.

"This tiger could smell the blood on us, and surrounded us, and the North Vietnamese soldiers that had us surrounded was more afraid of the tiger than they were of us. They backed off and gave us room and we were gone again," said Adkins, who co-authored a 2018 book about his wartime exploits titled "A Tiger Among Us."

After retiring from the Army in 1978 after more than 20 years, Adkins earned a bachelor's degree in finance and master's degrees in management and education from Alabama's Troy University while running an accounting firm in Auburn.

For years, Adkins taught night classes at two colleges and a jail for adults seeking their high school equivalency degrees. And in 2017, he established The Bennie Adkins Foundation, which has provided about 50 educational scholarships to Special Forces soldiers.

"He was really committed to help others advance themselves," said Katie Lamar Jackson, who co-authored Adkins' book.

Adkins' family plans for him to be buried beside his wife Mary, who died last year, at Arlington National Cemetery. But it's impossible to say when that might happen because of the pandemic.

"We're not even going to have a local funeral now," his son said. "There is no way we can follow the social distancing rules and have a funeral."

Ship tied to Australia virus deaths sails into Manila Bay

By AARON FAVILA Associated Press

CAVITE, Philippines (AP) — A cruise ship being investigated in Australia for sparking coronavirus infections anchored in Manila Bay on Thursday to bring Filipino crew members home.

The Ruby Princess joins at least 16 other cruise ships at anchor waiting for their more than 5,000 Filipino crew members to be tested for the coronavirus before disembarking.

Coast guard spokesman Armand Balilo said 214 Filipino crew members on the Ruby Princess will be tested but may have to wait behind those from other ships.

The Ruby Princess has been linked to 19 deaths in Australia and two in the United States. The Australian investigation is trying to determine why 2,700 passengers and crew were allowed to disembark in Sydney on March 19 before the test results of sick passengers were known.

Many passengers flew from Sydney overseas. Two died at home in the United States, including Los Angeles resident Chung Chen, whose family is suing Princess Cruises for more than \$1 million in a lawsuit alleging it failed to alert passengers to the risk.

An initial batch of 300 Filipino crew left the ship last month and were taken to Sydney to catch a charter flight to Manila.

The cruise ships have been asked to wait in a Manila Bay anchorage area instead of docking in nearby ports as part of strict precautions against the virus. Medical and coast guard teams in protective suits

travel by motorboats and carry out tests on board each anchored ship in a laborious effort before the Filipino crewmen can disembark for treatment in a hospital or to stay in further quarantine depending on the test results.

"The protocols are strict. Our teams get onboard, undertake swab tests then the crewmen wait for three days," Balilo said by telephone. "If they test positive, we bring them to a hospital but if they're OK, we release but they should still go into some days of isolation."

More than 24,000 Filipino workers, including nearly 17,000 ship crew and personnel, have returned by air and sea after being displaced by the coronavirus pandemic and lockdowns worldwide. They have overwhelmed quarantine facilities in metropolitan Manila.

Philippine officials have stopped incoming international flights for a week starting May 3 in an effort to decongest the quarantine facilities in metropolitan Manila and prepare for the arrival of tens of thousands more returning Filipino workers in the coming weeks.

The Philippines is a major source of global labor and the huge income remitted by millions of workers have kept Manila's economy afloat for decades and served as a lifeline for impoverished families.

Nearly 2,000 Filipinos have been infected by the coronavirus in 46 foreign countries and 215 have died, many of them workers, according to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila. A large number of Filipinos has faced layoffs due to business closures abroad and the government has struggled to bring many of them home.

Frontier Airlines will drop open-seat fee that drew attacks

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Frontier Airlines is dropping plans to charge passengers extra to sit next to an empty middle seat after congressional Democrats accused the airline of trying to profit from fear over the new coronavirus.

"We recognize the concerns raised that we are profiting from safety and this was never our intent," Frontier CEO Barry Biffle said late Wednesday in a letter to three lawmakers. "We simply wanted to provide our customers with an option for more space."

Biffle said the airline will rescind the extra fee, which Frontier called More Room, and block the seats from being sold.

Earlier in the day, Democrats had railed against Frontier's plan to charge passengers at least \$39 per flight to guarantee they would sit next to an empty middle seat. The offer was to begin with flights Friday and run through Aug. 31.

The chairman of the House Transportation Committee called it "outrageous." Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., said the Denver-based airline was using the need for social distancing during a pandemic "as an opportunity to make a buck ... capitalizing on fear and passengers' well-founded concerns for their health and safety."

Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn., highlighted the fee during a congressional hearing on how COVID-19 is affecting the airline industry.

"I don't think it's appropriate for some passengers who can't afford to pay an additional charge for a seat to be less safe than other travelers," Klobuchar said.

U.S. air travel has dropped more than 90% from a year ago because of the pandemic, and many flights are nearly empty. However, some flights — highlighted on social media — have been much more full, with many passengers not wearing face coverings. That has led airlines to say they will block middle seats when possible to create space between passengers.

From the outset, Biffle rejected the notion that his airline would be charging for social distancing.

"We are offering the option, and it is guaranteed. We don't believe you need it — if everybody is wearing a facial covering — to be safe," he told The Associated Press earlier this week. "It gives people more peace of mind if they want it."

Biffle said ticket sales rose after previous announcements around safety, including a decision to require passengers to wear masks, and he expected the same reaction to the empty-seat offer.

Airlines steal ideas from each other all the time, but so far, none have copied Frontier's More Room offer.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 33 of 66

During Wednesday's Senate Commerce Committee hearing, the president of Airlines for America, a trade group for the biggest U.S. carriers, said none of his airlines have a similar charge. Frontier is not a member.

The trade group official, Nicholas Calio, said other airlines block some middle seats and board passengers from back to front to keep spacing on planes.

Klobuchar asked if the federal government should issue guidelines to "fix" Frontier's policy. Calio said rules aren't necessary.

"Hopefully the market will take care of that," Calio said.

"Well, it didn't with Frontier," Klobuchar responded.

Hilary Godwin, dean of the school of public health at the University of Washington, said the Frontier policy "is exactly the reason that some national-level guidance" is needed for social distancing on airlines and in airports.

Godwin said crowded planes and long flights create the greatest risk for spreading the virus. She said the expectation that air travel will recover slowly is a good thing — it will give airlines and health officials time to decide the best steps to protect travelers and airline and airport workers.

Biffle announced Frontier would drop the fee idea in a letter to Reps. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., and Jesus Garcia, D-Ill., and Sen. Edward Markey, D-Mass.

U.S. health officials stress the importance of social distancing, and they also recommend that people wear cloth face coverings in public because some who are infected don't feel symptoms and could unknowingly spread the virus.

'If this thing boomerangs': Second wave of infections feared

By ERIC TUCKER and CARLA K. JOHNSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Europe and the U.S. loosen their lockdowns against the coronavirus, health experts are expressing growing dread over what they say is an all-but-certain second wave of deaths and infections that could force governments to clamp back down.

"We're risking a backslide that will be intolerable," said Dr. Ian Lipkin of Columbia University's Center for Infection and Immunity.

Elsewhere around the world, German authorities began drawing up plans in case of a resurgence of the virus. Experts in Italy urged intensified efforts to identify new victims and trace their contacts. And France, which hasn't yet eased its lockdown, has already worked up a "reconfinement plan" in the event of a new wave.

"There will be a second wave, but the problem is to which extent. Is it a small wave or a big wave? It's too early to say," said Olivier Schwartz, head of the virus unit at France's Pasteur Institute.

In the U.S., with about half of the states easing their shutdowns to get their economies restarted and cellphone data showing that people are becoming restless and increasingly leaving home, public health authorities are worried.

Many states have not put in place the robust testing that experts believe is necessary to detect and contain new outbreaks. And many governors have pressed ahead before their states met one of the key benchmarks in the Trump administration's guidelines for reopening -- a 14-day downward trajectory in new illnesses and infections.

"If we relax these measures without having the proper public health safeguards in place, we can expect many more cases and, unfortunately, more deaths," said Josh Michaud, associate director of global health policy with the Kaiser Family Foundation in Washington.

Cases have continued to rise steadily in places such as Iowa and Missouri since the governors began reopening, while new infections have yo-yoed in Georgia, Tennessee and Texas.

Lipkin said he is most worried about two things: the reopening of bars, where people crowd together and lose their inhibitions, and large gatherings such as sporting events, concerts and plays. Preventing outbreaks will require aggressive contact tracing powered by armies of public health workers hundreds of thousands of people strong, which the U.S. doesn't yet have, Lipkin said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 34 of 66

Worldwide the virus has infected more than 3.6 million people and killed over a quarter-million, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University that experts agree understates the dimensions of the disaster because of limited testing, differences in counting the dead and concealment by some governments.

The U.S. has recorded over 70,000 deaths and 1.2 million confirmed infections, while Europe has reported over 140,000 dead.

This week, the researchers behind a widely cited model from the University of Washington nearly doubled their projection of deaths in the U.S. to about 134,000 through early August, in large part because of the easing of state stay-at-home restrictions. Newly confirmed infections per day in the U.S. exceed 20,000, and deaths per day are running well over 1,000.

In hard-hit New York City, which has managed to bring down deaths dramatically even as confirmed infections continue to rise around the rest of the country, Mayor Bill de Blasio warned that some states may be reopening too quickly.

"My message to the rest of the country is learn from how much effort, how much discipline it took to finally bring these numbers down and follow the same path until you're sure that it's being beaten back," he said on CNN, "or else if this thing boomerangs, you're putting off any kind of restart or recovery a hell of a lot longer."

A century ago, the Spanish flu epidemic's second wave was far deadlier than its first, in part because authorities allowed mass gatherings from Philadelphia to San Francisco.

"It's clear to me that we are in a critical moment of this fight. We risk complacency and accepting the preventable deaths of 2,000 Americans each day," epidemiologist Caitlin Rivers, a professor at Johns Hopkins, told a House subcommittee in Washington.

President Donald Trump, who has pressed hard to ease the restrictions that have throttled the economy and thrown more than 30 million Americans out of work, pulled back Wednesday on White House plans revealed a day earlier to wind down the coronavirus task force.

He tweeted that the task force will continue meeting indefinitely with a "focus on SAFETY & OPENING UP OUR COUNTRY AGAIN."

Underscoring those economic concerns, the European Union predicted the worst recession in its quarter-century history. And the U.S. unemployment rate for April, which comes out Friday, is expected to hit a staggering 16 percent, a level last seen during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Governors continue to face demands, even lawsuits, to reopen. In Michigan, where armed demonstrators entered the Capitol last week, the Republican-led Legislature sued Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, asking a judge to declare invalid her stay-at-home order, which runs at least through May 15.

In hard-hit Italy, which has begun easing restrictions, Dr. Silvio Brusaferrò, president of the Superior Institute of Health, urged "a huge investment" of resources to train medical personnel to monitor possible new cases of the virus, which has killed about 30,000 people nationwide.

He said that contact-tracing apps — which are being built by dozens of countries and companies — aren't enough to manage future waves of infection.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said after meeting with the country's 16 governors that restaurants and other businesses will be allowed to reopen in coming weeks but that regional authorities will have to draw up a "restriction concept" for any county that reports 50 new cases for every 100,000 inhabitants within a week.

Britain, with over 30,000 dead, the second-highest death toll in the world behind the U.S., plans to extend its lockdown but has begun recruiting 18,000 people to trace contacts of those infected.

On Thursday, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern outlined a plan for a further relaxation of its lockdown rules, under which the country would reopen bars, retail stores and hair salons beginning next week and once again allow domestic travel.

In other developments, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said nearly 5,000 coronavirus illnesses and at least 88 deaths have been reported among inmates in American jails and prisons. An additional 2,800 cases and 15 deaths were reported among guards and other staffer members.

A 57-year-old immigration detainee at Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego died Wednesday from complications related to the coronavirus, authorities said, marking the first reported death from the virus among about 30,000 people in U.S. immigration custody. Otay Mesa has been a hotbed for the spread of the coronavirus.

Favre repaying \$1.1 M for no-show speeches, auditor says

By EMILY WAGSTER PETTUS Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. (AP) — Former NFL quarterback Brett Favre is repaying \$1.1 million in welfare money that he received for multiple speeches where he did not show up, the Mississippi state auditor said Wednesday.

Auditor Shad White said his office received \$500,000 from Favre on Wednesday, plus a commitment that Favre will repay the other \$600,000 in installments over the next few months.

Favre's effort to repay the money came two days after White released an audit of spending by the Mississippi Department of Human Services that showed Favre had been paid by Mississippi Community Education Center, a nonprofit group whose former leader has been indicted in a welfare embezzlement scheme.

Mississippi is one of the poorest states in the U.S., and the community education center had contracts with Human Services to spend money through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, also known as TANF.

"I want to applaud Mr. Favre for his good faith effort to make this right and make the taxpayers and TANF families whole," White said in a statement Wednesday. "To date, we have seen no records indicating Mr. Favre knew that TANF was the program that served as the source of the money he was paid."

The audit released Monday said the center paid Favre Enterprises \$500,000 in December 2017 and \$600,000 in June 2018, and he was supposed to make speeches for at least three events. The auditor's report said that "upon a cursory review of those dates, auditors were able to determine that the individual contracted did not speak nor was he present for those events."

Favre, who lives in Mississippi, faces no criminal charges. The audit report lists the payments to him as "questioned" costs, which White said means "auditors either saw clear misspending or could not verify the money had been lawfully spent."

In a Facebook post Wednesday night, Favre said he didn't know the payments he received came from welfare funds and noted his charity had provided millions of dollars to poor kids in his home state of Mississippi and Wisconsin, where he played the bulk of his Hall of Fame career with the Green Bay Packers.

"My agent is often approached by different products or brands for me to appear in one way or another. This request was no different, and I did numerous ads for Family First," Favre wrote.

"I have never received moneys for obligations I didn't meet. To reiterate Auditors White's statement, I was unaware that the money being dispensed was paid for out of funds not intended for that purpose, and because of that I am refunding the full amount back to the state of Mississippi.

"I have spent my entire career helping children through Favre 4 Hope donating nearly \$10 million to underserved and underprivileged children in Mississippi and Wisconsin.

"It has brought a ton of joy to my life, and I would certainly never do anything to take away from the children I have fought to help! I love Mississippi and I would never knowingly do anything to take away from those that need it most."

White said the money being repaid by Favre will be sent to the Department of Human Services.

Favre has not returned multiple text messages sent to him by The Associated Press since Monday. His manager, Bus Cook, told AP on Wednesday: "We've got nothing to say."

In an audit, White said his employees identified \$94 million in questionable spending by the agency, including payments for sports activities with no clear connection to helping needy people in one of the poorest states of the U.S.

The audit was released months after a former Human Services director and five other people were

indicted on state charges of embezzling about \$4 million. They have pleaded not guilty and are awaiting trial in what White has called one of Mississippi's largest public corruption cases in decades.

"If there was a way to misspend money, it seems DHS leadership or their grantees thought of it and tried it," White said.

John Davis was director of the Department of Human Services from January 2016 until July 2019, appointed by then-Gov. Phil Bryant — a Republican who also appointed White to office when a previous auditor stepped down. Davis was one of the people indicted; another was Nancy New, who was director of the Mississippi Community Education Center. Davis, New and the others indicted have pleaded not guilty and are awaiting trial.

AP left a phone message Wednesday at Mississippi Community Education Center's Jackson office with questions about the payments to Favre. There was no immediate response.

The auditor's report said Human Services leaders, particularly Davis, "participated in a widespread and pervasive conspiracy to circumvent internal controls, state law, and federal regulations" to direct grant money to certain people and groups. Davis instructed two groups that received grants, the Mississippi Community Education Center and Family Resource Center of North Mississippi, to spend money with certain other people or groups, the auditor's report said.

White said the those two nonprofit groups received more than \$98 million in Department of Human Services grants during the three years that ended June 30. Most of the money came from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

The audit will be sent to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and federal officials will decide whether to sanction the state for misspending, White said.

Dallas salon owner jailed for defying virus shutdown order

By JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — Texas' Republican governor and top law enforcement officer on Wednesday came to the defense of a Dallas hair salon owner who was jailed for keeping her business open in defiance of the governor's restrictions meant to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Shelley Luther was booked in the Dallas County jail on Tuesday following a video hearing during which she refused to apologize for repeatedly flouting the order, leading the judge to find her in contempt of court and sentence her to a week behind bars.

Luther was cited last month for keeping her salon open despite state and local directives that kept nonessential businesses closed, but she continued to defy the order and tore up a cease and desist letter in front of TV cameras.

"I couldn't feed my family, and my stylists couldn't feed their families," Luther testified Tuesday, saying she had applied for a federal loan but didn't receive it until Sunday.

Dallas County Judge Eric Moyer said during the hearing that he would consider levying a fine instead of jail time if Luther would apologize and not reopen until she was allowed to do so, but Luther refused.

"Feeding my kids is not selfish," she told Moyer. "If you think the law is more important than kids getting fed, then please go ahead with your decision, but I am not going to shut the salon."

Moyer wrote in his judgment of contempt: "The defiance of the court's order was open, flagrant and intentional." He noted that despite being given the opportunity to apologize, Luther "expressed no contrition, remorse or regret" for her actions.

Annette Norred, a paralegal with the law firm representing Luther, said they are preparing a court filing seeking her release. Luther isn't sure which program gave her the loan or how she's allowed to spend it, Norred said.

Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton sent a letter to the judge Wednesday asking him to release Luther from jail. U.S. Senator Ted Cruz also expressed support for her. Both are Republicans.

"I find it outrageous and out of touch that during this national pandemic, a judge, in a county that actually released hardened criminals for fear of contracting COVID-19, would jail a mother for operating her

hair salon in an attempt to put food on her family's table," Paxton said.

Abbott called the salon owner's punishment "excessive."

"Compliance with executive orders during this pandemic is important to ensure public safety; however, surely there are less restrictive means to achieving that goal than jailing a Texas mother," Abbott said in a statement.

In response, a letter to Paxton signed by Moye and the 11 other Dallas County civil district court judges called the attorney general's letter to a judge about a pending case an improper communication under the Texas Code of Judicial Conduct. The judges told Paxton they "trust this shall not happen further."

Some online fundraising efforts have been mounted on Luther's behalf, the largest of which had collected more than \$440,000 as of Wednesday evening.

The governor coming to the defense of someone violating his own executive order reflects the increasing pressure he faces to reboot the state at a much faster pace.

As Luther appeared in court Tuesday, Abbott gave permission for hair salons and barbershops in Texas to reopen by Friday, accelerating his own timeline.

Although Abbott last week allowed restaurants and retailers to reopen with limited capacity, he said at the time that mid-May was his goal to get hair salons and gyms up and running.

But some Texans haven't been willing to wait, including two GOP state lawmakers who let reporters film them getting haircuts outside Houston on Tuesday.

Mark Jones, a professor of political science at Rice University, said Abbott has to balance opening up too slowly and alienating the right wing of his party, and moving too quickly in a way that risks a resurgence of COVID-19 and the loss of moderate Republicans and swing voters.

"Gov. Abbott has been forced to follow a very narrow path," Jones said.

State Rep. Chris Turner, who chairs the House Democratic Caucus, compared Luther's case to that of a woman who was sentenced in 2018 to five years in prison for casting a provisional ballot in the 2016 presidential election while on probation.

"To all who are distraught over proud lawbreaker Shelley Luther getting 7 days in jail, I'd like to introduce you to Crystal Mason," Turner wrote on Twitter.

NFL sets protocols for reopening of team facilities

By BARRY WILNER AP Pro Football Writer

The NFL has set protocols for reopening team facilities and has told the 32 teams to have them in place by May 15.

In a memo sent by Commissioner Roger Goodell and obtained Wednesday night by The Associated Press, several phases of the protocols were laid out. The first phase to deal with the coronavirus pandemic would involve a limited number of non-player personnel, initially 50% of the non-player employees (up to a total of 75) on any single day, being approved to be at the facility. But state or local regulations could require a lower number.

The individual clubs would decide which employees could return to the facility and when once facilities reopen. No players would be permitted in the facility except to continue therapy and rehabilitation for injuries that was underway when facilities were ordered closed in late March by Goodell.

"While these protocols have been carefully developed and reflect best practices," Goodell wrote, "they can also be adapted and supplemented to ensure compliance with any state and local public health requirements."

Goodell noted that the league is actively working on the next phase of reopening, which will involve both more staffers, and players. He said the players' union is also being consulted on these steps. Those protocols are not yet fully developed.

Dr. Allen Sills, the NFL's medical director, will speak with each team physician and the infection control officer to discuss implementation and medical aspects of the protocols.

The step-by-step requirements are:

- Local and state government officials must consent to reopening.
 - The team must implement all operational guidelines set by the league to minimize the risk of virus transmission among employees.
 - Each club must acquire adequate amounts of needed supplies as prescribed by the league.
 - An Infection Response Team with a written plan for newly diagnosed coronavirus cases. --An Infection Control Officer to oversee all aspects of the implementation of the listed guidelines.
 - Each employee who returns to work at the club facility must receive COVID-19 safety and hygiene training prior to using the facility, and agree to report health information to the ICO.
 - The response team must consist of a local physician with expertise in common infectious disease principles; the team physician can fill that role. Also on the response team will be the infection control officer, the team's head athletic trainer; the team physician, if he or she is not serving as the local physician; the human resources director; the team's chief of security; its mental health clinician or someone with equivalent clinical expertise; and a member of the club's operations staff such as the facility manager.
- The league also is establishing workplace protocols that require face coverings unless a person is in a closed office. The orders also stress minimum contact, sufficient distancing, the gradual and phased return to in-person work, and continued "telework" and remote meetings to reduce the number of people at the facility. That includes adjusted hours and even shifts across all employees.
- Business travel is discouraged unless essential. Visitors and service providers on site will be limited and there will be no direct contact with fans — no retail activity or in- person ticket sales.
- Employees, including players, of course, will be encouraged to take their temperature routinely at home before heading to the team facility and to remain at home if their temperature is elevated. There will be daily screenings for all employees reporting to work, as well as visitors, contractors, and service providers who enter the club facility.
- "We will continue to work in a deliberate and thoughtful way to plan for the 2020 season, including with (Thursday night's) schedule release," Goodell said, "and we will be prepared to address any contingencies as they arise."

What you need to know today about the virus outbreak

By The Associated Press undefined

From the marbled halls of Italy to the wheat fields of Kansas, health authorities are increasingly warning that the question isn't whether a second wave of coronavirus infections and deaths will hit, but when — and how badly.

In India, which partly relaxed its lockdown this week, health authorities scrambled Wednesday to contain an outbreak at a huge market. Experts in Italy, where some restrictions are being eased, urged intensified efforts to identify victims, monitor their symptoms and trace their contacts.

Germany cleared the way for restaurants, hotels and soccer to reopen in the coming weeks but also threatened to again impose virus restrictions if new cases can't be contained.

Here are some of AP's top stories Wednesday on the world's coronavirus pandemic. Follow APNews.com/VirusOutbreak for updates through the day and APNews.com/UnderstandingtheOutbreak for stories explaining some of its complexities.

WHAT'S HAPPENING TODAY:

— The European Union predicted "a recession of historic proportions" due to the impact of the coronavirus, as it released its first official estimates of damage on the economy. The 27-nation economy is predicted to contract by 7.5% this year. U.S. small businesses, meanwhile, slashed more than 11 million jobs in April, according to a tally by payroll provider ADP.

— America's economy was showing significant stress. The viral outbreak likely sent the U.S. unemployment rate in April to its highest level since the Great Depression and caused a record-shattering loss of jobs.

— While attention was focused on the world's largest cities, the per capita death rates in the poor southwest corner of Georgia climbed to among the worst in the U.S. Communities that are rural, mostly

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 39 of 66

African American and poor are more likely to have jobs not conducive to social distancing. They also have less access to health care, and transportation is a challenge.

— A recent survey from the The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research shows that minorities have not only been hit harder by the deadly coronavirus than have Americans overall, but they're also bearing the brunt of the pandemic's financial impact.

— A scientist whose advice was key in triggering Britain's lockdown has resigned from a government advisory panel after his girlfriend crossed London to visit him at his home. Neil Ferguson, an epidemiologist at Imperial College, said he had "made an error of judgment." He developed models that predicted hundreds of thousands would die unless the U.K. imposed drastic restrictions to confront the coronavirus.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

For most people, the coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death. The vast majority of people recover.

Here are the symptoms of the virus compared with the common flu.

One of the best ways to prevent spread of the virus is washing your hands with soap and water. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends first washing with warm or cold water and then lathering soap for 20 seconds to get it on the backs of hands, between fingers and under fingernails before rinsing off.

You should wash your phone, too. Here's how.

TRACKING THE VIRUS: Drill down and zoom in at the individual county level, and you can access numbers that will show you the situation where you are, and where loved ones or people you're worried about live.

ONE NUMBER:

— 7: The number of days in jail for a Texas hair salon owner who kept her business open despite public orders to the contrary. Shelley Luther of Dallas declined an opportunity to apologize and get a fine instead of jail. "Feeding my kids is not selfish," she told a judge.

IN OTHER NEWS:

— **COVERED IN STYLE:** Face masks were rarely used in Latin America outside hospitals before the pandemic. But now they're becoming a colorful part of the region's daily life. There are lucha libre-themed masks in Mexico, logos of soccer clubs in Argentina, Batman characters in Peru and colorful swimsuit prints in Colombia.

— **WORK AND FOOD:** Organizers are calling it The Power of 10, an effort to rehire laid-off restaurant workers, keep independent eateries open and provide meals to neighborhood workers on the front line of the pandemic. The initiative aims to raise \$10,000 per week to support 10 full-time jobs at a local restaurant. Donations start as little as \$10 for one meal. "The math works everywhere," a chef says.

Sources: US investigating ex-Green Beret for Venezuela raid

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press Writer

MIAMI (AP) — A former Green Beret who has claimed responsibility for an ill-fated military incursion into Venezuela is under federal investigation for arms trafficking, according to current and former U.S. law enforcement officials.

The investigation into Jordan Goudreau is in its initial stages and it's unclear if it will result in charges, according to a U.S. law enforcement official who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. The probe stems from a frenzy of contradictory comments Goudreau has made since a small cadre of volunteer combatants he was advising on Sunday launched an impossible raid aimed at overthrowing Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Members of the U.S. Congress are also asking the State Department about its knowledge of Goudreau's plans and raised concerns that he possibly violated arms trafficking rules.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 40 of 66

An AP investigation published prior to the failed raid places Goudreau at the center of a plot hatched with a rebellious former Venezuelan Army Gen., Cliver Alcalá, to secretly train dozens of Venezuelan military deserters in secret camps in Colombia to carry out a swift operation against Maduro. The U.S. has offered a \$15 million reward for information leading to Maduro's arrest or conviction. He was indicted by the Trump administration in March on narcoterrorist charges.

The men were being readied for combat at three rudimentary camps in Colombia with the help of Goudreau and his Florida-based company, Silvercorp USA, multiple Maduro opponents and aspiring freedom fighters told the AP. But the plot seemed doomed from the start because it lacked the support of the Trump administration and was infiltrated by Maduro's vast, Cuban-trained intelligence network, the AP found.

The law enforcement official said Goudreau's comments suggests his work on behalf of the volunteer army may have violated laws that require any U.S. company supplying weapons or military equipment, as well as military training and advice, to foreign persons to seek State Department approval.

Experts agree.

"Goudreau's public comments alone show he was exporting his lethal expertise into a foreign country," said Sean McFate, a former U.S. Army paratrooper who worked as a private military contractor and is the author of a book, "The New Rules of War," on the foreign policy implications of privatized warfare. "This is a serious violation."

Goudreau declined to comment Tuesday. The State Department said it is restricted under law from confirming licensing activities.

The law enforcement official said Goudreau's possible involvement in weapons smuggling stems from the March 23 seizure by police in Colombia of a stockpile of weapons being transported in a truck. Alcalá claimed ownership of the cache shortly before surrendering to face U.S. narcotics charges in the same case for which Maduro was indicted.

The stockpile, worth around \$150,000, included spotting scopes, night vision goggles, two-way radios and 26 American-made assault rifles with the serial numbers rubbed off. Fifteen brown-colored helmets seized by police were manufactured by High-End Defense Solutions, a Miami-based military equipment vendor owned by a Venezuelan immigrant family, according to Colombian police.

High-End Defense Solutions is the same company that Goudreau visited in November and December, allegedly to source weapons, according to two former Venezuelan soldiers who claim to have helped the American select the gear but later had a bitter falling out with Goudreau amid accusations they were moles for Maduro. The AP could not independently verify their account.

Company owner Mark Von Reitzenstein has not responded to repeated email and phone requests seeking comment.

Two former law enforcement officials said an informant approached the Drug Enforcement Administration in Colombia prior to the weapons' seizure with an unsubstantiated tip about Goudreau's alleged involvement in weapons smuggling. The anti-narcotics agency, not knowing who Goudreau was at the time, didn't open a formal probe but suspected that any weapons would've been destined for leftist rebels or criminal gangs in Colombia — not a ragtag army of Venezuelan volunteers, the former officials said on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations. One of the officials said the information was later passed on to the Department of Homeland Security.

The DEA said it does not comment on ongoing potential investigations.

Authorities in Colombia are also looking into Goudreau as part of their investigation into the seized weapons shipment, a Colombian official told the AP on the condition of anonymity to discuss an ongoing case.

Meanwhile, officials in U.S. Congress are expressing concern. Democratic congressional staff contacted the State Department multiple times on Monday seeking information about any possible contacts with Goudreau or knowledge of his activities, and whether his work may have violated International Traffic in Arms Regulations, according to a staffer on the condition of anonymity to discuss the private outreach.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Wednesday reiterated President Donald Trump's claims a day earlier that there was no direct U.S. government involvement in Goudreau's brazen operation.

"If we'd have been involved, it would have gone differently," he joked. "As for who bankrolled it, we're

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 41 of 66

not prepared to share any more information about what we know took place. We'll unpack that at an appropriate time, we'll share that information if it makes good sense."

Goudreau, a three-time Bronze Star recipient, has insisted that his work providing only strategic advice to the combatants doesn't require special licensing. Still, he acknowledged sending into battle two special forces buddies associated with Silvercorp and who are now in Venezuelan custody.

"You've got to introduce a catalyst," he said in a phone interview with the AP Monday from Florida. "By no means am I saying that 60 guys can come in and topple a regime. I'm saying 60 guys can go in and inspire the military and police to flip and join in the liberation of their country, which deep down is what they want."

Goudreau has said he was hired by Juan Guaidó, who the U.S. considers Venezuela's rightful leader. To back his claim, he's produced an 8-page agreement he signed with what appears to be the signature of Guaidó. The opposition leader has refused to say whether the signature on the "general services agreement" is authentic.

On Wednesday what some 60 nations recognize as Venezuela's legitimate government denied having signed any "alleged contract" and insisted it has no ties or commitments to Silvercorp. In a statement it accused Maduro of infiltrating the so-called "Operation Gideon" and using a "false document as justification to try and kidnap and illegally detain the interim president Juan Guaidó."

Contradictions abound in Goudreau's account as well. In a televised interview with "Factores de Poder," a Miami media outlet popular with Venezuelan exiles, he claims he never received a "single cent" for his work yet continued to prepare the men for battle, in the process going deep into debt. JJ Rendon, a Miami-based adviser to Guaidó, said he gave Goudreau \$50,000 as requested to cover some expenses. Goudreau acknowledged the payment to the AP and other media.

A person familiar with the situation said the agreement was signed by Rendon and another U.S.-based aide to Guaidó, lawmaker Sergio Vergara, in October. Guaidó at one point briefly greeted Goudreau via video conference — as evidenced by an audio recording made on a hidden cellphone by Goudreau and which he shared with the Venezuelan journalist.

"Let's get to work!" said a voice that appears to be Guaidó in the leaked recording. He makes no mention of any military incursion.

A few days later, the team cut off contact with Goudreau, realizing he was unable to deliver what he had promised and because they were not getting along, the person said. An attempt to reactivate the accord fell through in November because the opposition had abandoned support for a private military incursion, the person said. The last contact with Goudreau was a few weeks ago when a lawyer on the veteran's behalf wrote Rendon seeking to collect a promised \$1.5 million retainer. Goudreau, through intermediaries, made it known that if they didn't pay up he would release the agreement to the press, the person said.

It's unclear how the weapons were smuggled into Colombia. But Silvercorp in December bought a 41-foot fiberglass boat, Florida vessel registration records show, and proceeded in February to obtain a license to install maritime navigation equipment. On his application to the Federal Communications Commission, he said the boat would travel to foreign ports.

The boat next appeared in Jamaica, where Goudreau had gathered with a few of his special forces buddies looking to participate in the raid, according to a person familiar with the situation on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive dealings.

But as they were readying their assault, the boat broke down at sea on March 28 and an emergency position-indicating radio beacon was activated, alerting naval authorities on the island of Curacao. Goudreau had to return to Florida, prevented from rejoining his troops prior to the landing because of travel restrictions put in place due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"He would have 100% gone out in a blaze of gunfire because that's who he is," said the person.

Trump: COVID-19 task force not dismantling, just refocusing

By ZEKE MILLER, JILL COLVIN and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Wednesday reversed course on plans to wind down his COVID-19 task force, attempting to balance his enthusiasm for “reopening” the country with rising infection rates in parts of the nation.

The indecision on the fate of the expert panel was emblematic of an administration — and a country — struggling with competing priorities of averting more death and more economic suffering. Trump appears focused on persuading Americans to accept the price of some lives lost as restrictions are eased, concerned about skyrocketing unemployment and intent on encouraging an economic rebound ahead of the November election.

Democrats criticized Trump’s reopening strategy Wednesday, saying more federal support for testing and contact tracing is needed. While the daily number of new deaths in the New York area has declined markedly in recent weeks, deaths have essentially plateaued in the rest of the U.S.

One day after the administration suggested that its work would be done around Memorial Day, Trump said the White House task force of public health professionals and senior government officials would continue after all, indefinitely, with its focus shifting toward rebooting the economy and the development of a vaccine.

“I thought we could wind it down sooner,” Trump said, adding, “I had no idea how popular the task force is.”

A White House official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal thinking, acknowledged that signaling on Tuesday that the task force was preparing to shut down had sent the wrong message and created a media maelstrom.

While the task force has already been meeting less frequently, its medical experts, particularly Drs. Anthony Fauci and Deborah Birx, have emerged as among the most trusted voices on the virus response. The Tuesday announcement of ending the task force sparked concerns that they would be sidelined as the outbreak continues amid fears of a fresh wave of illness in the fall.

Trump said Tuesday he would still seek their counsel, regardless of the fate of the task force.

“It is appreciated by the public,” he said of the task force.

Trump said membership in the group would change as the nature of the crisis evolves.

In the Wednesday tweets Trump said “the Task Force will continue on indefinitely.” He added that the White House “may add or subtract people to it, as appropriate. The Task Force will also be very focused on Vaccines & Therapeutics.”

A day earlier, Trump made himself Exhibit A for reopening the country with a visit to an Arizona face mask factory, using the trip to demonstrate his determination to see an easing of stay-at-home orders even as the coronavirus remains a dire threat. Trump did not wear a mask despite guidelines saying they should be worn inside the factory at all times.

As Trump pressed the nation to reopen, Dr. Tom Frieden the former director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention testified Wednesday on Capitol Hill that the “war against COVID will be long and difficult.”

“We’re just at the beginning of this pandemic and must focus on the future,” he testified, predicting there will be 100,000 deaths by the end of the month. As bad as the crisis has been, he said, “it’s just the beginning.”

Even as Trump was declaring that much of the task force’s work on securing additional protective equipment was over, he was confronted with a different reality.

Sophia Thomas, president of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners, told Trump in an Oval Office meeting that she had been reusing the same N95 medical mask for weeks, and only brought a new one for her visit to the White House. Still, Trump dismissed reports of shortages as “fake news.”

Later, during an event with Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds, Trump pointed to the U.S. topping the world in COVID-19 testing, after months of supply shortages hampering the testing program. Des Moines has

emerged as a new hotspot in recent days.

Reynolds told Trump that the virus "won't go away for a while," and that testing was essential to curtail its spread.

Trump has encouraged the nation to accept the human cost of returning to normalcy, saying repeatedly that Americans should view themselves as "warriors" combating the virus.

"I'm not saying anything is perfect, and yes, will some people be affected? Yes. Will some people be affected badly? Yes. But we have to get our country open and we have to get it open soon," he said Tuesday.

In an interview Wednesday, Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi criticized Trump's approach. "Death is not an economic motivator, stimulus," she said. "So why are we going down that path?"

"Everyone's eager to get out," she added. "To unlock the lockdown is to test, trace, treat as well as isolate social distancing."

Trump on Wednesday defended his decision not to wear a face covering when he visited a Honeywell plant in Phoenix that makes them, saying he briefly donned one backstage, out of view of the press, for "not too long" a time.

Trump told reporters in the Oval Office as he signed a proclamation honoring nurses, that, "I actually did have one. I had a mask on for a period of time."

He added that he couldn't "help it" if reporters didn't see him and that the head of Honeywell had told him that he didn't need to wear one during the public portions of his visit.

The CDC has recommended that all Americans wear cloth masks when they can't socially distance. In the area where Trump spoke, a large video monitor listed safety guidelines, one of which said, "Please wear your mask at all times."

Pelosi suggested Wednesday that Trump's resistance to wearing a mask is "a vanity thing."

"Apparently the president has washed his hands of this," Pelosi said. "The task force is here today, gone tomorrow. No mask."

Israeli Supreme Court: Netanyahu may form government

By JOSEF FEDERMAN and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's Supreme Court ruled Wednesday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may form a new government while under indictment for corruption charges, clearing the way for him and his rival-turned-uneasy ally to join together in a controversial power-sharing deal.

The unanimous decision, released just before midnight, ended a 17-month political stalemate and prevented the country from plunging into a fourth consecutive election in just over a year. Netanyahu and his rival-turned-partner, Benny Gantz, said they expected their coalition to be sworn into office next week.

After battling to three inconclusive elections over the past year, Netanyahu and Gantz, a former military chief, announced their "emergency" government last month, saying they would put aside their rivalry to steer the country through the coronavirus crisis.

Critics and good-government groups said the deal was illegal and challenged it in the Supreme Court. They argued that the law should bar an official charged with serious crimes from continuing as prime minister. They also objected to the newly created position of "alternate prime minister," a post that could allow Netanyahu to remain in office throughout his corruption trial and a potential appeals process.

Over two days this week, the court looked at two questions: whether an indicted politician can be given authority to form a new government, and whether the power-sharing deal — which includes new legislation — was legal.

In its decision, the 11-judge panel expressed misgivings about the coalition agreement and Netanyahu's criminal indictment, but found no grounds to prevent the government from taking office.

"We did not find any legal reason to prevent MK (Member of Knesset) Netanyahu from forming a government," the court said.

"The legal conclusion we reached does not diminish the severity of the pending charges against MK Netanyahu for violations of moral integrity and the difficulty derived from the tenure of a prime minister

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 44 of 66

accused of criminal activity," it added.

The judges ruled that while the coalition deal presents significant legal difficulties, the court would not interfere in its contents following changes submitted by Netanyahu and Gantz.

Netanyahu has been indicted with fraud, breach of trust and accepting bribes in a series of scandals involving trading favors with wealthy media moguls. His trial is set to start later this month.

Netanyahu denies any wrongdoing, and since his indictment last fall, he has repeatedly lashed out at the country's legal system. He and his political allies have taken special aim at the high court, accusing it of overreach and political interference.

As the court was meeting earlier this week, Netanyahu urged it not to get involved in political affairs, lest it risk dragging the country toward new elections. The long-time leader's opponents consider the court a bastion of democracy under dangerous assault and had expressed hope it would strike down what they see as a deal that undermines the public's faith in government.

Eliad Shraga, a lawyer representing one of the petitioners against the coalition deal, expressed disappointment but said he would respect the decision. "We will continue to raise the flag of morality," he told Channel 12 news.

With the court hurdle cleared, Netanyahu and Gantz must complete two more procedural steps before they can move ahead with their deal: pass the legislation needed to pave the way for their convoluted coalition agreement and amass the signatures of 61 lawmakers — a parliamentary majority — in favor of Netanyahu as prime minister-designate to be sent to Israel's ceremonial president by a midnight Thursday deadline.

With more than a majority of the Knesset's support, including from Gantz' party, both steps appear to be easily attainable.

Throughout three bruising campaigns, Gantz repeatedly vowed never to sit in a government with Netanyahu. And after March elections, a narrow majority of lawmakers endorsed him as prime minister. Gantz began preparing legislation that would have banned Netanyahu from continuing as prime minister.

But in a sudden about face, Gantz accepted an invitation to form a partnership with Netanyahu to confront the coronavirus crisis, infuriating many of his supporters and causing his Blue and White party to split in half.

Last month, the two sides agreed on a coalition deal that makes the two men equal partners, with virtual veto power over each other's decisions. Because of its unorthodox arrangement, the Knesset must pass new legislation before they take office.

Under the deal, Netanyahu and Gantz would be sworn in together, with Netanyahu serving first as prime minister and Gantz as the designated premier. After 18 months, the two are to swap positions. The new position will enjoy all the trappings of the prime minister, including an official residence and, key for Netanyahu, an exemption from a law that requires public officials who are not prime minister to resign if charged with a crime.

Netanyahu is eager to remain in office throughout his trial, using his position to lash out at the judicial system and rally support among his base. The coalition deal also gives him influence over key judicial appointments, creating a potential conflict of interest during an appeals process if he is convicted. His trial was postponed in March due to restrictions his hand-picked interim justice minister placed on the courts after the coronavirus crisis erupted and is scheduled to commence later this month.

The court said Netanyahu would need to abide by a conflict of interest arrangement while prime minister whenever dealing with law enforcement affairs.

Under the deal, the sides agreed not to take immediate action on key appointments and prioritize legislation focusing on reviving Israel's economy from the coronavirus crisis.

But it makes an exception for Netanyahu to press ahead with plans to annex large parts of the West Bank, including all of Israel's dozens of settlements there. Netanyahu is permitted to push the issue through parliament after July 1, even without Gantz's support.

Netanyahu and his hardline supporters are eager to annex the territory while the friendly administration

of U.S. President Donald Trump is in office. The Palestinians and most of the international community oppose annexation and say it would end any lingering hopes of a peace deal.

AP-NORC poll: Pandemic especially tough on people of color

BY KAT STAFFORD and EMILY SWANSON Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — People of color have not only been hit harder by the deadly coronavirus than have Americans overall, but they're also bearing the brunt of the pandemic's financial impact, according to a recent survey from the The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The financial picture is especially grim for Hispanic Americans, while some African Americans face the dual burden of being disproportionately affected by the virus itself while also struggling to pay bills due to the economic fallout.

The poll found that 61% of Hispanic Americans say they've experienced some kind of household income loss as a result of the outbreak, including job losses, unpaid leave, pay cuts and fewer scheduled hours. That's compared with 46% of Americans overall. Thirty-seven percent of Latinos and 27% of black Americans say they've been unable to pay at least one type of bill as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. Only 17% of white Americans say the same.

"If our policies do not adequately address these shortfalls and the racial disparities in income, wealth, employment and wages, then we're going to see the same pattern that we have seen historically," said Valerie Wilson, director of the left-leaning Economic Policy Institute's program on race, ethnicity and the economy. "It's going to take much longer for these families to recover — if they ever recover economically."

The survey, conducted in mid-April, found that 21% of Hispanics have been unable to make a rent or mortgage payment as a result of the outbreak, while 23% have been unable to pay a credit card bill. That compares with 8% of white Americans in both cases. Black Americans are also slightly more likely than white Americans to have been unable to pay a credit card bill, at 15%.

New Mexico resident Denise Abraham, a retired teacher and librarian, said her 34-year-old son has experienced a loss of income after he quit his restaurant job because he didn't want to potentially expose his family to the virus.

"As a community, I don't see a lot of anger, just a lot of sadness and worry about what's to come," Abraham, a Hispanic woman, said, adding that she's worried about the Navajo Nation and people who are in the country illegally becoming infected. "But what this shows now is who we really need and who's really doing the labor to carry our economy. It's always been on the shoulders of poor people."

While income losses have hit Americans across the board, layoffs have been especially concentrated among lower income and less educated people. Twenty-eight percent of Americans without college degrees say they've had a layoff in their household, compared with 19% of those with degrees.

Milwaukee resident Tamela Andrews was excited to start her new job a few months ago as an inventory specialist, serving some of the big box stores in her community. She and several others at her company were furloughed after the pandemic began. Andrews, a 51-year-old black woman, was able to land a different job, but she's concerned for the future.

"I hope when things do go back to normal maybe the stores will have us back for our other jobs," Andrews said. "It's up in the air though and it's really stressful to experience this."

Along with the financial impact, people of color are also more likely to know someone close to them who has been diagnosed with COVID-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus. The poll found that 12% of Americans say they or a close friend or relative has been diagnosed. Among black Americans, 21% say they or someone close to them has been diagnosed.

A separate Associated Press analysis of available state and local data shows that nearly one-third of those who have died of COVID-19 are African American, with black people representing about 14% of the population in the areas covered in the analysis.

San Diego resident Cristina Hall, who identifies as Hispanic, said communities of color tend to have a cultural history of multiple generations of families living together. She believes those strong familial ties

have put some at risk, as has work in jobs, such as those in the service industry, that require them to interface with the public.

"It's frustrating," Hall, 41, said. "All of these protests all over the United States (to reopen state economies), who do you see? You don't see people of color at those protests. It's a sense of entitlement that they want this economy to open, not so they can necessarily go back to work but so that people of color can go back to work and take care of them."

While the protests have garnered attention, the AP-NORC poll found that most Americans overwhelmingly support restrictions aimed at containing the virus and are taking personal actions to protect themselves from the coronavirus. Ninety-five percent say they're both washing hands more frequently and staying away from large groups. African Americans are also more likely than either white or Hispanic Americans to say they're wearing masks outside the home, 83% to 64% and 67%, respectively.

"I take it very seriously, because it's an invisible killer," said Michael French, a 62-year-old black man, of St. Paul, Minnesota, who says he wears a mask and gloves everywhere he goes. "But some people won't until it affects them personally and then they'll wake up to the deadliness of this virus."

Kraftwerk co-founder Florian Schneider-Esleben dies aged 73

BERLIN (AP) — Florian Schneider-Esleben, who helped pioneer electronic music as the co-founder of Kraftwerk and influenced genres ranging from disco to synth pop, has died at age 73.

Citing fellow group founder Ralf Huetter, Sony announced that Schneider-Esleben had been suffering from cancer, German news agency dpa reported. Schneider-Esleben and Huetter met while both were students at the Academy of Arts in Remscheid. They started working together in 1968, and two years later founded the Kling-Klang-Studio in Duesseldorf and launched Kraftwerk.

"From the beginning, we had a concept of electronic folk music. It's a kind of anticipatory music, looking ahead to the age of the computer," Huetter told the German broadcaster Deutsche Welle in 2014.

They rarely spoke to reporters and their individual names were largely unknown to the general public, but few groups were as important in shaping the sounds of popular music over the past half century. Just as their sensibility anticipated the computer age, their immersion in drum machines, synthesizers and other electronic instruments would be echoed in countless songs, whether in pop hits like Blondie's "Heart of Glass" and Soft Cell's "Tainted Love" or in the music of Depeche Mode, Bjork and David Bowie, who named one of his songs "V-2 Schneider."

"EVERY modern musician owes something to this man's vision," the Cure's Lol Tolhurst tweeted Wednesday.

Kraftwerk albums included the breakthrough release "Autobahn," "Radio-Activity," "Trans-Europe Express," "The Man-Machine" and "Tour de France." The German group won a Grammy award for lifetime achievement in 2014, when it was praised for creating some of the most "influential work in our musical history."

Schneider-Esleben was the son of modernist architect Paul Schneider-Esleben and spent much of his childhood in Duesseldorf. Both he and Huetter were already working in avant-garde and experimental music when they met. In a 2005 interview with MOJO magazine, Huetter described him as a "sound perfectionist."

"So, if the sound isn't up to a certain standard, he doesn't want to do it," he said. "With electronic music there's no necessity ever to leave the studio. You could keep making records and sending them out. Why put so much energy into travel, spending time in airports, in waiting halls, in backstage areas, being like an animal, just for two hours of a concert?"

April jobs data to show epic losses and soaring unemployment

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The economic catastrophe caused by the viral outbreak likely sent the U.S. unemployment rate in April to its highest level since the Great Depression and caused a record-shattering loss of jobs.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 47 of 66

With the economy paralyzed by business closures, the unemployment rate likely jumped to at least 16% — from just 4.4% in March — and employers cut a stunning 21 million or more jobs in April, economists have forecast, according to data provider FactSet. If so, it would mean that nearly all the job growth in the 11 years since the Great Recession had vanished in a single month.

Yet even those breathtaking figures won't fully capture the magnitude of the damage the coronavirus has inflicted on the job market.

Many people still employed have had their hours reduced. Others have suffered pay cuts. Some who've lost jobs won't have been able to look for work amid widespread shutdowns and won't even be counted as unemployed. A broader measure — the proportion of adults with jobs — could plunge to a record low.

"What we're talking about here is pretty stunning," said Diane Swonk, chief economist at Grant Thornton. "The shock is unique because the cause is unique. It's such a different animal from anything that we've ever seen."

The government will issue the April jobs report on Friday morning. On Thursday, it will release the latest weekly report on applications for unemployment benefits. It will likely show that about 3.5 million people sought jobless aid last week. That would bring the total number of layoffs to nearly 34 million since the shutdowns began seven weeks ago.

That figure is much larger than the expected April job loss because the two are measured differently: The government calculates job losses by surveying businesses and households. It's a net figure that also counts the hiring that some companies, like Amazon and many grocery stores, have done despite the widespread layoffs. By contrast, the total jobless claims is a cumulative figure that includes aid applications that began in March.

Still, the job loss for April may be much larger than expected, with most economists acknowledging that their usual models might not work as well in a collapsing job market. Swonk notes that several million unauthorized immigrants who weren't able to file for unemployment benefits were nevertheless probably laid off last month. Those jobs losses would be counted, though, in the government's surveys. Swonk estimates that April's job loss could total as high as 34 million.

Companies are still cutting jobs in the midst of a severe downturn, with the economy possibly shrinking at an unheard-of 40% annual rate in the April-June quarter. GE Aviation said it is cutting up to 13,000 jobs. Uber will shed 3,700 positions.

Amy Egert, a dental hygienist in Severn, Maryland, was laid off in mid-March. She was told she could return a month later, but she's still waiting and it's unclear when she will be able to go back. She monitors Maryland statistics on coronavirus cases in hopes that the figures will show enough of a downward trend for her to work again.

"As I watch the numbers, it's like OK, are we going to make it back by the end of May?" Egert asked. "Is it going to be the first of June? Is it going to be mid-June?"

She is receiving the extra \$600 in unemployment included in the government's relief package but still wants to return.

"I've got diabetics out there that haven't had their teeth cleaned," Egert said. "They come every four months, and I'm thinking they're going to be a mess."

Even as the unemployment rate reaches dizzying heights, it will likely be held down by several factors. The Labor Department counts people as unemployed only if they're actively searching for work. Yet many laid-off workers may be discouraged from looking for a new job given that so many non-essential businesses are closed. Others may stay home to protect their health. Still others may feel they have to stay with children who are home from school.

In addition, some workers on temporary layoff might be incorrectly classified as what the government calls "employed, but absent from work." This can happen if employees assume they will return to their jobs once their employer reopens. In March, the Labor Department said that such misclassification by its survey takers — who have never before dealt with pandemic-related shutdowns — lowered the unemployment rate by a full percentage point.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 48 of 66

Jason Faberman, senior economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, says that including those workers, as well as millions who still have jobs but who have been reduced to part-time status, could raise a broader gauge of what's called under-employment to 25% or higher on Friday.

Alexander Bick and Adam Blandin, economists at Arizona State University and Virginia Commonwealth University, respectively, have conducted two surveys since the virus outbreak began that mirror the government's monthly survey that it uses to calculate the unemployment rate. They conclude that the proportion of American adults in their prime working years — 25 through 54 — who have jobs, fell to just 60.4% in April, the lowest on record.

They also noted that millions of Americans have had their hours cut in April.

"We have never had such low hours" worked, on average, for each employed person, Bick said.

Maduro airs video of American detained in Venezuela plot

By CHRISTINE ARMARIO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

BOGOTA, Colombia (AP) — Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro touted a video showing a scruffy-looking American divulging details about a failed invasion as proof Wednesday that U.S. authorities backed an alleged attempt to forcibly remove him from power.

Maduro aired a video of Luke Denman on state television in which the 34-year-old Texas native claims he signed a contract with a Florida-based company to train rebel troops and carry out the assault in exchange for up to \$100,000.

"I was helping Venezuelans take back control of their country," he said.

Denman and Airan Berry, both former U.S. special forces soldiers who served in Iraq, were detained Monday following what authorities described as a botched beach landing in the fishing village of Chuao. Both men are associated with Silvercorp USA, a private firm founded by Jordan Goudreau, an ex-Green Beret claiming responsibility for the alleged incursion.

President Donald Trump has said the United States had nothing to do with the purported attack and Goudreau is under federal investigation for arms trafficking, according to current and former U.S. law enforcement officials. Nonetheless, the Venezuelan leader insists his U.S. adversary was behind the apparent attempt to force him out.

"There's the proof," he said, pointing to the video, in which Denman indicates that Trump was behind Silvercorp's incursion. "And there will be more."

Nonetheless, opposition critics and observers said the testimony should be taken with a grain of salt, noting that Venezuelan authorities have a record of forcing statements. Though Denman did not appear under duress, one expert noted that he made an unusual and exaggerated gesture with his eyes in what may have been a covert signal to those watching.

"Special operation soldiers are trained to find creative ways to discredit any propaganda videos they are forced to make if captured by the enemy," said Ephraim Mattos, a Navy SEAL who had visited the rebel training camps in Colombia but was not involved in the operation.

He said that the odd eye movement immediately after saying Trump was Goudreau's boss is "a clear sign from Luke that he is being forced."

The confusing events have sparked new tensions between Venezuela and the U.S., which has been a staunch ally of opposition leader Juan Guaidó, the lawmaker recognized by nearly 60 nations as the country's legitimate president. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reiterated Trump's claims Wednesday from a day earlier that there was no direct U.S. involvement.

"If we'd have been involved, it would have gone differently," he chided.

Democratic congressional staff, meanwhile, contacted the State Department multiple times Monday seeking any information about possible contacts with Goudreau or knowledge of his activities.

In the video aired Wednesday, Denman said Goudreau tasked him with training troops, and then staging an attack to "secure" Caracas and the airport. He said he arrived in Colombia in mid-January, driving to the border with two others to instruct about 60 people.

"I believed it was helping their cause," he said, dressed in a gray T-shirt and sporting a coarsely cut hairstyle and goatee.

Denman's family released a statement describing him as a decorated soldier who took up civilian jobs at a tree farm and a hotel since leaving the military in 2014. More recently, he'd begun working as a deep-sea diver.

"The first indication we had of anything different is the images coming out of Venezuela," said Mark Denman, his older brother. "Our only concern only concern at this time is getting Luke home safely."

Maduro accused Guaidó Wednesday of being behind the attack, holding up a written agreement with Goudreau that allegedly bears his signature as evidence.

Goudreau has said he was hired by Guaidó and is backing his claim with an eight-page agreement. In a televised interview with "Factores de Poder," a Miami outlet popular with Venezuelan exiles, he contends he never got a "single cent" for his work but continued to prepare men for battle. JJ Rendon, a Miami-based adviser to Guaidó, said he gave Goudreau \$50,000 as requested to cover some expenses.

Guaidó has denied any involvement.

Maduro deferred when asked whether the latest developments were grounds for arresting Guaidó, saying prosecutors would need to conduct an investigation.

As for the captured Americans, he said they are, "convicted and confessed."

Uber lays off 3,700 as virus upends sharing economy

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In a world where the coronavirus pandemic has turned social distancing into a new way of life, companies whose business models bank on people's willingness to share their personal space are now struggling.

Uber said Wednesday it's cutting 3,700 full-time workers, or about 14% of its workforce, as people fearful of infection either stay indoors or try to limit contact with others to minimize risk when they do venture out. Rival Lyft and home-sharing service Airbnb have also announced cuts because of falling usage.

The layoffs and related costs like severance will cost about \$20 million for Uber, which had already imposed a hiring freeze. The San Francisco-based company has offered up to 14 days of financial assistance to drivers and delivery workers who were diagnosed with the COVID-19 disease, or placed in quarantine.

Those ride-hailing drivers still on the road are trying to avoid infection and patch together enough fares to put dinner on the table even as ridership plummets.

"A lot of us are living on the razor's edge of homelessness," said Jerome Gage, 28, who drives for Uber's rival Lyft in Los Angeles. "We have to work or we don't eat."

Gage, who as a contract worker does not have paid sick leave or health insurance, has seen his income plummet as the number of rides he provided fell about 75%. He got one disposable mask and a few small bottles of sanitizer from Lyft, but said it's not enough to keep him safe.

"Any trip, you could contract the virus," Gage said. "So every single day we're on the road we're in harm's way."

Lyft announced last month it would lay off 982 people, or 17% of its workforce in the face of sinking ridership. The San Francisco company expects to spend \$28 million to \$36 million on expenses related to employee severance and benefit costs.

Lyft's revenue grew 23% to \$955.7 million in the first quarter, which doesn't capture the full extent of the outbreak. The number of active riders grew just 3%, the company said Wednesday. Lyft lost \$398.1 million, which was better than the year-ago loss of \$1.1 billion when the company had higher expenses related to its IPO.

"While the COVID-19 pandemic poses a formidable challenge to our business, we are prepared to weather this crisis," said Logan Green, co-founder and CEO, in a statement. "We are responding to the pandemic with an aggressive cost reduction plan that will give us an even leaner expense structure and allow us to emerge stronger."

Ride-hailing companies are facing pushback from drivers who want to be classified as employees instead of independent contractors, which some say would speed the process of getting unemployment benefits. California sued Uber and Lyft on Tuesday, alleging they misclassified their drivers as independent contractors under the state's new labor law.

Both Uber and Lyft are trying to conserve cash so they can weather the pandemic's fallout, in part by emphasizing deliveries of food and other goods. Lyft, which in the past touted its singular focus on transportation, started a temporary service called "Essential Deliveries" last month to deliver goods such as groceries to food banks and senior centers. Uber is expanding Eats, its restaurant delivery service, into 20 international markets this year.

But the success of their businesses depends on people being willing to open up their cars, and drivers in some parts of the country can make more money collecting unemployment benefits, said Stephen Beck, managing partner of cg42, a management consulting firm.

The psychology of riders' decision-making is also shifting. Ride-hailing companies were banking on people deciding they would rather hitch a ride than own a car, a belief that has changed for some consumers during the pandemic. Riders also will be making decisions about what's safest, and would have to trust that a shared vehicle less risky than a bus or train.

Even in its worst-case scenario -- an 80% decline in ridership through 2020 -- Uber has said it would end the year with \$4 billion in cash. That would still mean burning through almost \$7 billion this year, which could create problems for Uber's larger ambitions such as self-driving cars and air taxis.

Airbnb is slashing staff as the thought of opening living spaces to strangers begins to feel like an anachronism.

On Tuesday, the company announced it was cutting a quarter of its workforce, some 1,900 people. The San Francisco-based company expects its revenue to drop by more than half this year.

It was not so long ago that Airbnb was poised to cash in on a soaring stock market with its highly anticipated public offering. But with the market now reeling and few people looking to anywhere but home, Airbnb is reportedly racking up millions of dollars in losses.

When consumers eventually resume traveling, Airbnb CEO Brian Chesky anticipates they will spend less and stay closer to home. Earlier this year, after the company told guests they could cancel their stays without penalties, it agreed to pay furious hosts \$250 million to make up for some of their lost income.

Judicial nominee pledges open mind on health law he blasted

By **MATTHEW DALY** Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal judge nominated to the nation's second-most powerful court said Wednesday that he was writing as an academic and commentator when he criticized as "indefensible" a Supreme Court ruling upholding the Affordable Care Act.

Justin Walker, a 37-year-old protege of Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell and Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, said he will have an open mind on the Obama-era health care law if it comes before him as a district or appeals court judge. At a hearing on his nomination to a seat on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, Walker declined a request by Senate Democrats to recuse himself on matters related to the health-care law if he's confirmed.

Walker said he was "an academic and a citizen engaged in the public sphere" when he wrote a 2018 article calling Chief Justice John Roberts' opinion upholding the health care law "indefensible" and "catastrophic." Walker said he would be bound by the ruling as precedent and would consider any challenge to it with an open mind.

Democrats say Walker's confirmation could threaten the health of millions of Americans protected by the law, which the Trump administration is challenging in court.

"After 162 TV appearances and all you've written (on the health care law), it's painful to hear you say you have an open mind," Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., told Walker.

He and other Democrats complained that McConnell, the Kentucky Republican who leads the Senate,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 51 of 66

had called the chamber back into session to consider Walker's nomination, despite a stay-at-home order in Washington amid the coronavirus crisis. The seat Walker would take will not be vacant until September.

"What I think is indefensible is we are here in the midst of a public health crisis considering the nomination of someone who would dismantle a health care system that is saving lives right now," said Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.

"What I consider indefensible," he told Walker, "is that you have taken a position passionately that would deprive many of those front-line health care workers ... of their health care."

Blumenthal and Durbin were among the few Democrats who attended the hearing in person. Most were connected to the meeting through a video link.

None of the senators wore masks, and Walker's face was uncovered throughout the hearing, which lasted 2 1/2 hours.

Walker also was asked about comments he made during a speech in March, celebrating his recent confirmation as a judge, in which he lavished praise on Kavanaugh, who was confirmed to the Supreme Court in 2018 after a bitter partisan fight over allegations of sexual assault and other claims. Walker clerked for Kavanaugh when he was on the appeals court to which Walker is nominated.

Walker compared Kavanaugh to St. Paul — "persecuted but not abandoned" — and said, "In Kavanaugh's America, we will not surrender while you wage war on our work, or our cause, or our hope, or our dream." The speech, in Louisville, Kentucky, was attended by McConnell, Kavanaugh and other conservative luminaries.

"What war is Justice Kavanaugh waging?" asked Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I.

Walker said he was describing the kind of judge Kavanaugh is, adding that he will defend Kavanaugh and former Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy — another mentor — "until the cows come home."

In his speech, Walker referred to his values as ones progressives might call "deplorable," a reference to Democrat Hillary Clinton's criticism of President Donald Trump's supporters.

"We are winning, but we have not won," Walker said.

Walker drew a "Not Qualified" rating from the American Bar Association when Trump nominated him last year to be a federal judge in Kentucky. The group changed its rating this week, calling him "Well Qualified" to serve on the appeals court.

"Based on interviews and a review of his scholarship and other writings, the (ABA's) Standing Committee believes that Judge Walker possesses a keen intellect, and his writing ability is exemplary," the group wrote in a letter Tuesday to the Senate Judiciary Committee.

The letter cited Walker's experience as a clerk to Kavanaugh and Kennedy and his six months as a federal trial judge. Walker, a graduate of Duke University and Harvard Law School, was confirmed as a judge last year. He previously was a lawyer in Louisville and Washington.

McConnell said Wednesday that his protege and family friend "possesses a generational legal mind, a kind heart and total judicial impartiality."

"President Trump made an outstanding choice when he asked this Kentuckian to take his public service to the next level. I am confident Judge Walker will not disappoint," McConnell added.

Liberal groups were incensed at Walker's nomination for a quick promotion to the nation's second-highest court. More than 200 groups, including the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, the NAACP and the National Council on Jewish Women oppose Walker's nomination, citing his record against expanding access to health care and against safeguards for the environment, consumers and the workplace.

Senate Democratic Leader Chuck Schumer said Walker "has more experience as a cable news commentator than he does trying cases in court."

Walker's qualifications "pale in comparison to those of previous nominees to the D.C. Circuit" by presidents of both parties, Schumer said. "Nominees by Democratic presidents and Republican presidents all were deeply steeped in the law, just about every one. What Leader McConnell is doing to the courts is nothing short of disgraceful."

3 Russian doctors fall from hospital windows during pandemic

By DARIA LITVINOVA Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Two Russian doctors have died and another was seriously injured in falls from hospital windows after they reportedly came under pressure over working conditions in the coronavirus pandemic.

The exact circumstances of the separate incidents in the last two weeks remain unclear and they are being investigated by police, but they underscore the enormous strains that Russian doctors and nurses have faced during the outbreak.

Reports said two of the doctors had protested their working conditions and the third was being blamed after her colleagues contracted the virus.

Across Russia, doctors have decried shortages of protective equipment and questionable infection control procedures at dozens of hospitals, with many saying they have been threatened with dismissal or even prosecution for going public with their grievances. Hundreds of medical workers also have gotten infected.

Dr. Alexander Shulepov, who works on an ambulance crew in the Voronezh region, 500 kilometers (310 miles) south of Moscow, fell from a second-floor window May 2 at a hospital where he was being treated for COVID-19, breaking several ribs and fracturing his skull.

In a video posted earlier on social media by his colleague, Alexander Kosyakin, both complained about shortages of protective gear. In the video, the 37-year-old Shulepov said he was being forced to finish his shift despite being diagnosed with COVID-19.

But later, local health officials shared another video of Shulepov on social media in which he retracted his earlier complaints, saying he was being emotional.

Kosyakin was accused of spreading false news about the shortages after posting the video and is under investigation. He refused to comment to The Associated Press.

It is unclear what caused Shulepov's fall. Some local media reports said he slipped while trying to climb from his window for a smoke outside, while others suggested it was due to the pressure for airing his complaints in public.

A doctor died from injuries she sustained in an April 25 fall in the city of Krasnoyarsk in western Siberia. Dr. Yelena Nepomnyashchaya, acting head of a hospital, fell from her fifth-floor office window right after she had a conference call with regional health officials, local media reported, citing anonymous sources.

The reports said Nepomnyashchaya had argued against converting a ward in her hospital for coronavirus patients because of severe shortages of protective equipment and trained personnel, but she failed to sway the officials. Krasnoyarsk health officials denied such a call took place.

Nepomnyashchaya died May 1 in intensive care.

On April 24, Dr. Natalya Levedeva sustained fatal injuries after falling out of a window in a hospital in Moscow, where she was admitted with suspected COVID-19. She ran an ambulance station in Star City, Russia's spaceflight training facility just outside Moscow, which reported several dozen coronavirus cases in April.

Levedeva died immediately after the fall, which health officials said was an accident. Some media, reports however, suggested she was distraught after being accused of failing to protect her staff from getting infected and had killed herself because of it.

Russia has reported 166,000 infections and 1,537 virus deaths, but health officials in the West have said the country was underreporting its infections and fatalities.

There is no official data on how many Russian health workers have died working on the front lines of the pandemic and Russia's Health Ministry did not respond to AP's numerous requests for comment.

Last week, a group of Russian doctors compiled an online Memory List of doctors, nurses and other medical personnel who died during the outbreak. The list currently has 111 names.

Authorities have decided to reopen all industrial plants and construction sites in Moscow starting next week, citing a stable rate of new cases. President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday it will be up to officials in other regions to determine whether to ease lockdown measures that have been in place since the end of March.

'It's gone haywire': When COVID-19 arrived in rural America

By **CLAIRE GALOFARO** Associated Press

DAWSON, Ga. (AP) — The reverend approached the makeshift pulpit and asked the Lord to help him make some sense of the scene before him: two caskets, side by side, in a small-town cemetery busier now than ever before.

Rev. Willard O. Weston had already eulogized other neighbors lost to COVID-19, and he would do more. But this one stood as a symbol to him of all they had lost. The pair of caskets, one powder blue, one white and gold, contained a couple married 30 years who died two days apart, at separate hospitals hours from each other, unaware of the other's fate.

The day was dark. There was no wind, not even a breeze. It felt to some like the earth had paused for this.

As the world's attention was fixated on the horrors in Italy and New York City, the per capita death rates in counties in the impoverished southwest corner of Georgia climbed to among the worst in the country. The devastation here is a cautionary tale of what happens when the virus seeps into communities that have for generations remained on the losing end of the nation's most intractable inequalities: these counties are rural, mostly African American and poor.

This story was produced with the support of the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

More than a quarter of people in Terrell County live in poverty, the local hospital shuttered decades ago, and businesses have been closing for years, sending many young and able fleeing for cities. Those left behind are sicker and more vulnerable; even before the virus arrived, the life expectancy for men here was six years shorter than the American average.

Rural people, African Americans and the poor are more likely to work in jobs not conducive to social distancing, like the food processing plant in nearby Mitchell County where four employees died of COVID-19. They have less access to health care and so more often delay treatment for chronic conditions; in southwest Georgia, the diabetes rate of 16 percent is twice as high as in Atlanta. Transportation alone can be a challenge, so that by the time they make it to the hospital, they're harder to save.

At least 21 people have died from COVID-19 in this county, and dozens more in the neighboring rural communities. For weeks, Weston's phone would not stop ringing: another person in the hospital, another person dead. An hour before this funeral, Weston's phone rang again, and this time it was news that another had succumbed to the virus—his own first cousin, as close to him as a brother.

Some here had thought that their isolation might spare them, but instead it made the pandemic particularly cruel. In Terrell County, population 8,500, everyone knows everyone and every death is personal. As the mourners arrived at the cemetery, just the handful allowed, each knew others suffering and dying.

The couple's son, Desmond Tolbert, sat stunned. After caring for his parents, he'd also rushed his aunt, his mother's sister, to a hospital an hour away, and there she remained on a ventilator. Her daughter, Latasha Taylor, wept thinking that if her mother survived, she would have to find a way to tell her that her sister was dead and buried.

"It's just gone haywire, I mean haywire," thought Eddie Keith, a 65-year-old funeral home attendant standing in the back who was familiar with all the faces on the funeral programs piling up. "People dying left and right."

Usually, on hard days like this, he would call his friend of 30 years, who was a pastor at a country church and could always convince him that God would not give more than he could endure.

But a couple weeks earlier, that pastor had started coughing, too.

As Georgia and other states rush to reopen, some out-of-the way places might believe that the virus won't find them. Many here thought that, too. But it arrived, quietly at first then with breathtaking savagery.

The cemetery on the edge of town staggered graveside services, one an hour, all day. The county coro-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 54 of 66

ner typically works between 38 and 50 deaths a year; they reached No. 41 by mid-April. They ordered an emergency morgue.

Of the 10 counties with the highest death rate per capita in America, half are in rural southwest Georgia, where there are no packed skyscraper apartment buildings or subways. Ambulances rush along country roads, just fields and farms in either direction, carrying COVID-19 patients to the nearest hospital, for some an hour away. The small county seats are mostly quiet, the storefronts shuttered, some long ago because of the struggling economy, and some only now because owners are too afraid to reopen.

These counties circle the city of Albany, which is where authorities believe the outbreak began at a pair of funerals in February. Albany is also home to the main hospital in the region, Phoebe Putney Memorial, which serves an area of 800,000 people spanning more than 50 miles in every direction, many of them with little other access to care.

The hospital saw its first known coronavirus patient on March 10; within a few days, it had 60 and the ICU was full. Two weeks later, patients began flooding in from farther-flung rural communities. Helicopters buzzed from the top of the parking garage, flying patients to other hospitals that still had room to take them. They burned through six months of masks and gowns in six days, said Phoebe Putney president Scott Steiner. Then they were competing for supplies against wealthier, more politically powerful places; they paid \$1 each for surgical masks that typically cost a nickel and were losing about \$1 million each day.

The patients were very sick. Some died within hours. Some died on the way, in the back of ambulances. The region is predominantly black, but still African Americans died disproportionately, Steiner said. African Americans accounted for about 80% of the hospital's deaths.

Black people have been dying at alarming rates across the country: the latest Associated Press analysis of available data shows that African Americans represent about 14% of the population in the areas covered but nearly one-third of those who have died.

By nearly every measure, coronavirus patients are faring worse in rural Georgia than almost anywhere else in America, according to researchers at Emory University in Atlanta. Although New York City had thousands more deaths, the per capita death rate in these Georgia counties is just as high.

"They are vulnerable people living in vulnerable places, people who are marginalized on a variety of measures, whether we're talking about race, whether we're talking about education or employment, in places that have fewer resources," said Shivani Patel, an epidemiologist at Emory. Then COVID-19 arrived: "It's like our worst nightmare coming true."

Dr. James Black, the medical director of emergency services at Phoebe Putney, was born in this hospital, grew up in this region and is proud of how they've managed with the odds stacked against them. He hasn't had a day off in two months. The question now, he believes, is whether society decides, in the wake of the virus, to continue neglecting its most vulnerable people and places.

"I think that history is going to judge us not only on how well we prepared, it's not going to just judge us on how well we responded," he said, "but what we learned from it, and what we change."

Georgia has lost seven rural hospitals in the last decade. Nine counties in rural Georgia don't even have a doctor, according to the Georgia Alliance of Community Hospitals; 18 have no family practitioner, 60 have no pediatrician, 77 without a psychiatrist.

Ezekiel Holley, the longtime leader of Terrell County's NAACP, said health care is what has left him "banging his head against a wall."

At first Holley thought a virus would be one thing that did not discriminate. He opened the newspaper, scanned the faces in the obituaries and knew every one of them.

"Then I thought, why are low income people and people of color dying more than anyone else? This is the richest nation in the world, why doesn't it have a level playing field?" he said. "Tell me that."

At first, Benjamin Tolbert just felt a malaise; he had no appetite. Within a couple days, he could barely stand.

His son, Desmond, took him to the hospital in Albany. By then it was full, and he was sent to another

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 55 of 66

hospital an hour south. Benjamin's wife, Nellie Mae, who everyone called Pollye Ann, got sick the next day. She was routed from the Albany hospital to another an hour north.

Everyone in town knew Benjamin, 58, as a hard worker. He had worked for 28 years at a Tyson Foods plant, and yet he always found more work to do, washing his car, tending the lawn. He and his wife had been together 30 years. He was mild-mannered, but she found a joke in everything. She was a minister, she played the organ, sang gospel and danced, wildly, joyfully.

"Oh my goodness, she was a dancer, and the dances were so hilarious, you would just fall out laughing watching her dance and laugh at herself," said their niece, Latasha Taylor, whom they loved like a daughter. Benjamin would hang back, but Pollye Ann would pull him up and he'd dance along with her.

Both were diabetic, Pollye Ann had had heart valve surgery, Benjamin had been on dialysis. Pollye Ann's sister, Katherine Taylor Peters, often got dialysis treatments with him. They were a close-knit family: Peters lived just blocks away.

Shortly after the Tolberts got sick, Peters called her daughter and said she too had an incessant cough and was struggling to breathe. Latasha was working hours away, so she called her cousin, Desmond, and asked him to check on her.

He put her in his car and drove her to another hospital an hour from home. They soon sedated her and put her on a ventilator.

Much of the rest is a blur for Desmond and Latasha: calls from doctors and nurses, driving hours among three hospitals, begging to see their parents but being told it was far too dangerous.

"I couldn't see them, I couldn't talk to them," said Desmond, 29, who had lived with his parents all this life. Suddenly he was alone.

And all around them, neighbors were getting sick.

"So many people, it's a feeling you can't even explain. It's like a churning in your stomach," said Taylor. "People you're normally waving at, speaking to in passing, at the pharmacy, you're never going to see them again."

Desmond was on the phone with a nurse as his mother took her last breath. Two days later, the call came from his father's caregivers. Benjamin never knew that his wife got sick. She didn't know her husband was on his death bed. They were apart, far from home, without their son at their sides.

The only solace he can find is imagining them meeting again on the other side, and that neither had to live without the other one.

Eddie Keith had known this couple all his life, he knew their phone number by heart, where they lived, where they worked, their mothers and fathers.

"They knew me real well," he said, "as well as I knew them."

He has worked for the funeral home for 35 years, and part of his job is to pick up the bodies. He got a call about Pollye Ann's passing, and when a hometown person dies someplace else, he considers it his duty to bring them home to Dawson.

Sometimes he talks to them as he drives, sometimes he sings.

When the second call came about her husband, two days later, he wondered if what was happening in his city might be too much to bear. He's used to death. But now people were dying one right after the next, too quickly to reckon with each in real time.

Keith is a deacon at a country church down a dirt road just outside of town. His pastor, Rev. Alfred Starling, always told him that God doesn't make mistakes, and Keith wanted to be reminded of that now, because Dawson's people kept dying, and Keith kept retrieving them. But the next morning he was picking up a body in Tallahassee when the pastor's wife called. He'd gone to the hospital with a bad cough, and he hadn't made it.

They'd known each other 30 years. Once, years ago, he'd complimented his pastor's necktie. After that, every time the pastor bought himself a tie, he bought Keith one too. It became a symbol of their love for each other. "He would always look out for me," he said.

Keith pulled off the road and sat there a half an hour.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 56 of 66

"Why God? Why God? Why God?" he thought, and he caught himself. He was always taught not to question God, so he asked for forgiveness.

There were three funerals the next day, and he left just after to pick up his pastor's body.

He talked to him: "I didn't think you'd leave me so early; I thought we were going to grow old together."

He thought of his pastor's favorite spiritual. "Good news, good news," the pastor would sing and walk from behind the pulpit, a little strut in his step. "I'm going to lay down my burden, store up my cross. And I'm going home to live with Jesus, ain't that good news."

He sang it to his pastor as he drove him home.

By time the Tolberts' funeral arrived, so many had been lost to COVID-19 that Rev. Willard Weston had gotten used to delivering his eulogies through a mask. Gloves. Hand sanitizer. Don't touch, don't embrace, no matter how much you want to.

"At this pace, you don't get a chance to really take a deep breath from the previous death, and then you're getting a call about another," he said. He'd found himself on his knees in his bathroom, trying to scream out the sadness so he could keep going.

He put on his suit and tie.

He walked outside, looked up to the sky and pleaded with God to find the strength to deliver a double funeral.

"Lord, how can I go and do this?"

In normal times, the Tolbert family's funeral would have drawn a packed house. Pollye Ann was a minister at Weston's church. She could deliver testimony like no one he'd ever seen: she was like a freight train, he recalled, slow at first then faster, faster, faster. People were drawn to her.

Instead it was just him and a handful of mourners in the cemetery, staring at the two caskets. He read from scripture and told their son, Desmond, that he'd never walk alone.

He worried his instinct to comfort with an embrace would overtake his knowledge that he couldn't, so he walked away and got in his car. He felt guilty. He prayed for God to take that guilt away. Because there was more to do. The next Saturday, he would have three funerals, back to back.

A couple weeks later, on a Friday afternoon, he was preparing to leave his empty church and head home for the weekend without a single funeral planned for the first time in weeks. It felt hopeful. Then his phone rang again.

"Man, no. Oh, wow," he said, and his shoulders slumped.

"Some more bad news. Somebody else has passed."

There was some good news too.

Pollye Ann Tolbert's sister survived weeks on a ventilator. She still tested positive for coronavirus and remained in isolation, so her daughter Latasha could only talk to her by phone.

The first thing she asked when she woke was how her sister and brother-in-law were doing. Latasha paused. Her mother repeated the question. It felt unreal. Mail still arrived in the mailbox for them. Their house was just as it was the day they left for the hospital. She and her cousin had washed the linens and wiped the surfaces to rid it of virus, but were otherwise too paralyzed to move a thing.

"I had to tell her that while she was sleeping, her sister and brother-in-law left us forever," Latasha said. "They're already buried, they're in the ground."

Peters told her daughter that the last thing she remembered was a doctor on the phone, telling her that her sister wasn't going to make it. She thought she would die too, if not from COVID-19, then from grief.

She had hoped it was all a bad dream.

Then she woke up.

Israeli billionaire hopes to bring water to parched Gaza

By FARES AKRAM and ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — A Georgian-Israeli billionaire believes he has found a solution to the Gaza Strip's chronic water crisis.

Michael Mirilashvili wants to deliver hundreds of generators that produce drinking water out of thin air. His company, Watergen, sent a machine to a Gaza hospital last week in a rare case of Israeli-Palestinian cooperation in the Hamas-ruled enclave.

Gaza's water situation is dire. Since the 2007 Hamas takeover of the crowded Palestinian territory, Gaza's 2 million people have endured a crippling border blockade by Israel and Egypt that froze virtually all trade and most travel.

The 13-year-old lockdown, along with three Israel-Hamas wars, has produced chronic power cuts and damaged Gaza's infrastructure, contributing to water contamination.

Electricity shortages prevent proper sewage treatment, forcing the strip to spew over 100,000 cubic meters (3.5 million cubic feet) of poorly treated sewage into the Mediterranean each day, according to U.N. estimates.

Gaza relies on an aquifer as its main source of potable water. But over-extraction has allowed sea water to seep in, rendering 97% of the area's water undrinkable.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Mirilashvili said he wants to send more water generators to Gaza "because they are our neighbors and it's a great pity to look at them suffering from such severe water shortages."

He spoke days after one of his machines was installed on the roof of the Al-Rantisi Medical Center in Gaza City. Just a day after delivery, the generator, a large blue cube roughly the size of a vending machine, began producing cold, clean water for the hospital's pediatric cancer ward.

Most of Gaza's households buy water from private vendors who desalinate water at small-scale stations. But experts warn this water is impure. UNICEF estimates two-thirds of this water is already contaminated by the time it is delivered.

The children undergoing cancer treatment at the Gaza hospital need clean food and water because their immune system has been compromised, said Nima Ashour of the Palestine Children's Relief Fund, a U.S.-based charity that runs the pediatric department.

The dire shortage of clean water makes the Watergen machine "very important" for the hospital, she said.

The Watergen device runs on electricity. But because of frequent power outages, the machine will soon be connected to solar panels. In the winter, the device can be hooked up to conventional power supplies.

Functioning like a dehumidifier, the machine extracts moisture from the air and converts it into drinking water. The machine sent to the Gaza hospital is a medium-sized model and generates about 800 liters, or over 200 gallons, a day. Watergen says its largest generators can provide clean drinking water to thousands of people. The company has also developed a new consumer version for home use.

Watergen's technology was initially developed for military use in 2009, but it shifted gears to civilian markets after Mirilashvili bought the company in 2017.

Even the billionaire has had to wrestle with Israel's military bureaucracy, which tightly controls access to Gaza. Mirilashvili said that it took him over a year to receive permission to transfer a first Watergen machine to Gaza. It was delivered to a southern town last December for a separate project.

Israel says the blockade is needed to prevent Hamas from arming, and it closely inspects all incoming cargo to make sure it is not used for military purposes.

After winning swift permission for the hospital project, Mirilashvili believes the procedure will now get easier and that he could deliver enough water generators to meet the territory's daily drinking water needs within a year. The generators can cost tens of thousands of dollars apiece. Watergen, which donated the new machine to the hospital, said it is prepared to sell additional devices to Gaza at a "substantial discount."

COGAT, the Israeli defense body responsible for Palestinian civilian affairs, said it coordinated the entry of the machine to Gaza. "We will continue working around the clock to prevent the humanitarian condi-

tions in the Gaza Strip from further deteriorating," said Col. Iyad Sarhan, a commander for Gaza affairs. Mirilashvili, who was born in Georgia, controls a vast business empire that has included casinos, hotels, oil, real estate and Russia's largest social network.

In the 2000s, he spent eight years behind bars in Russia on kidnapping charges he dismissed as fabricated. The European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2008 that he didn't receive a fair trial, and he was subsequently released. He now spends much of his time in Israel, where he is a prominent philanthropist.

Watergen has deployed its machines in over 60 countries, both developing countries lacking water infrastructure, such as India and Uzbekistan, and in areas of developed countries suffering from drought, such as California.

Mirilashvili donated the generator to the hospital after he was approached by Jerusalem-based Palestinian businessman Fayez Hussein, a former chief executive of Palestinian mobile phone company Wataniya. Hussein now owns a small firm that promotes water and solar projects in Gaza.

Hussein said he learned about the hospital's critical situation in February while working on another project with the Palestine Children's Relief Fund. He said he looked at various options and concluded the Watergen machine provided the fastest and simplest solution.

"It doesn't need pipes. It doesn't need concrete," he said.

Bassem Naim, a Hamas official who was not familiar with the project, said he believes it's all right to cooperate with Israel in humanitarian matters that affect the life of Gazans.

Hussein said that for this project, Israeli authorities gave quick approval to move the generator across the border. Although there were no dealings with Hamas authorities in Gaza, he said he did not expect any trouble there either.

"I think both sides need to take electricity and drinking water off the table," he said. "This should not be part of politics."

No school-made gifts for mom this year. Dads, get to work.

By JOSH CORNFIELD Associated Press

PRINCETON, N.J. (AP) — At first, the Facebook meme made me laugh: "What are dads going to do when they realize their kids aren't bringing home any Mother's Day gifts from school?"

Then it hit me: What AM I going to do?!

Most years, my wife and I keep gifts basic. Flowers and a Sunday together with family is usually just right. The (sometimes) cute presents the kids make at school provide a fun moment of "awwwwww," followed by a year of figuring out where to put them so they're both seen and out of the way.

This Mother's Day, of course, is different.

Not only has Abby been a patient and caring mother to our 8- and 5-year-old sons over these last seven weeks of quarantine, she's also been their part-time teacher, play date, gym partner and best friend. And she's done it all while working full-time from the dining room table, juggling Zoom calls with her second-grade class and keeping our own second grader from smashing his computer during calls.

So just because there are no handmade presents from art class this year doesn't mean we can go into Mother's Day empty-handed. We dads have to figure it out.

Let's get to work.

STEP ONE: Take a breath. It's not that hard...

STEP TWO: What are you talking about? What do I know about arts and crafts? The last time I tried to make something with popsicle sticks, half of them cracked and the other half were glued to my fingers.

Dads, we need a plan.

STEP THREE: Make it easy on yourself, and go to those in charge: Ask the kids what to make.

Depending on how old they are, you may need to guide this conversation. Otherwise, you could get what I got talking with 5-year-old Oren.

Me: "Oren, what do you want to make mommy for Mother's Day?"

Oren: "Let's make her a car. A car out of food."

Me: "How about a card out of food?"

Oren: "No, it has to be a car. But wait. Can I tell you what we're making the wheels out of? Not eggs because if we made it out of eggs they would crack. We're making it out of apples!"

Me: "Can we please make her a card out of food?"

Oren: "No!! It has to be my choice. We're making a car. Or a plane."

This is a good time for a couple of reminders:

1. Sometimes you have to overrule your 5-year-old. We're making a card.
2. It's Mother's Day, so let her sleep as long as she wants. THEN the kids can start making things out of food.

STEP FOUR: Remember to get all of your kids involved. Jacob, 8, has been working on his cooking skills, so he'll handle some of that.

And he also has a more high-tech idea. While each day for Jacob has come with a burst of anger at all he is missing, he also has been steadily acquiring some tech skills.

Instead of wasting money buying a card, Jacob plans to make his own online. He pulled together pictures and background images, and will get to spend some time thinking about everything his mom has done for him during the pandemic.

STEP FIVE: Still need help figuring this out? Let's bring in an expert.

Susan Schwake, an art teacher who works with children and adults in Rollinsford, New Hampshire, says it's best to keep things simple.

"If you just let them create, they'll probably create something wonderful," she said this week, in between running art classes over Zoom. "You have to allow them the space to do that."

She suggests that dads step back and make sure kids have the materials they need to let their ideas come alive. "Don't micromanage it," she says.

Paint and crayons will get the job done, and Schwake also offers a simple recipe for making clay on the stove (baking soda, corn starch and water) for things like hand-printed discs, for younger kids.

"These kind of things are simple, but I think that they are the things that we treasure most," says the mother of two adult children.

You can find similar DIY recipes and ideas on YouTube and other online sites.

Good luck, dads, and know that by the time you're done, you'll be ready for the next job: gifts for grandmom.

ADP: More than 20 million jobs vanished in April

By JOSH BOAK AP Economics Writer

BALTIMORE (AP) — U.S. businesses cut an unprecedented 20.2 million jobs in April, an epic collapse with coronavirus outbreak closing the offices, factories, schools, construction sites and stores that propel the U.S. economy.

The Wednesday report from payroll company ADP showed the tragic depth and scale of job losses that left no part of the world's largest economy unscathed. The losses will likely continue through May, with a recovery in hiring likely to begin in the months that follow, said Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics.

"This is one for the record books," Zandi said. "The good news is that we're at the apex of the job loss."

Even though Zandi expects hiring to resume in June as states ease lockdowns, he cautioned that it will be a "slog" over several years to recover all the jobs lost in April.

The private industry report comes two days ahead of the official monthly job figures from the U.S. Labor Department. Economists believe the Friday report will reveal unemployment in the U.S. stands at a shocking 16%, up from 4.4% in March.

According to ADP, the leisure and hospitality sector shed 8.6 million workers last month. Trade, transportation and utilities let 3.4 million people go. Construction firms cut nearly 2.5 million jobs, while manufacturers let go of roughly 1.7 million people. The health care sector cut 1 million jobs, but education

services eked out a gain of 28,000 as colleges and universities do not appear to have forced significant layoffs that could come later this year.

More than half of April's job losses came from smaller companies with 500 workers or fewer. But larger employers cut 8.9 million jobs. Polling by The Associated Press and NORC Center for Public Affairs Research indicates that nearly eight in 10 households that suffered job losses expect to return to their previous employer.

Trump: COVID-19 task force not dismantling, just refocusing

By ZEKE MILLER, JILL COLVIN and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — One day after saying that the COVID-19 task force would be winding down, President Donald Trump said Wednesday that it would continue indefinitely, but focus more on rebooting the economy.

Trump tweeted that the panel's focus would be on "SAFETY & OPENING UP OUR COUNTRY AGAIN."

Trump's reversal comes as deaths and infections rates outside of New York, the epicenter of the coronavirus, are rising even as states move to lift their lockdowns.

A White House official acknowledged Wednesday morning that signaling that the task force was preparing to shut down sent the wrong message and created a media maelstrom. The official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal thinking, said the membership in the task force group would change as the nature of the crisis evolves.

On Tuesday, Trump had praised the task force for doing a great job, but said "we're now looking at a little bit of a different form, and that form is safety and opening. And we'll -- we'll have a different group probably set up for that."

His tweet on Wednesday said "the Task Force will continue on indefinitely." He added that the White House "may add or subtract people to it, as appropriate. The Task Force will also be very focused on Vaccines & Therapeutics."

Trump made himself Exhibit A for reopening the country with his Tuesday visit to an Arizona face mask factory, using the trip to demonstrate his determination to see an easing of stay-at-home orders even as the coronavirus remains a dire threat. Trump did not wear a mask despite guidelines saying they should be worn inside the factory at all times.

"The people of our country should think of themselves as warriors. We have to open," Trump declared Tuesday as he left Washington on a trip that was more about the journey than the destination.

In Arizona, Trump acknowledged the human cost of returning to normalcy.

"I'm not saying anything is perfect, and yes, will some people be affected? Yes. Will some people be affected badly? Yes. But we have to get our country open and we have to get it open soon," he said.

Trump had said he would don a face mask if the factory was "a mask environment," but in the end he wore only safety goggles during a tour of the Honeywell facility. Nearly all factory workers and members of the press as well as some White House staff and Secret Service agents wore masks. Senior White House staff and Honeywell executives did not.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has recommended that all Americans wear cloth masks when they can't socially distance, such as in supermarkets, especially in places with high transmission rates. In the area where Trump spoke, a large video monitor listed safety guidelines, one of which said, "Please wear your mask at all times."

Vice President Mike Pence created a stir recently when photos showed him maskless in a visit to the Mayo Clinic surrounded by hospital officials and doctors all wearing masks. He said that he hadn't known it was a requirement and that he is tested for the virus frequently. He wore a mask at an event a few days later.

The president spent about three hours in Phoenix, touring the Honeywell factory and holding a round-table on Native American issues. Aides said the trip would be worth the nearly eight hours of flight time as a symbolic show that the nation is taking steps back to normalcy. The trip was also expected to be a marker of Trump's return to a regular travel schedule, as he hopes the nation, too, will begin to emerge from seven weeks of virus-imposed isolation.

Trump sees economic revival as a political imperative, as his allies have noted an erosion in support for the president in recent weeks. Republicans believe Trump's path to a second term depends on the public's perception of how quickly the economy rebounds from shutdowns meant to slow the spread of the virus.

The White House had begun discussions about winding down its coronavirus task force, which has already been meeting less frequently, Pence said Tuesday. Its members have become fixtures on television sets across the nation, with Americans hungry for information and marooned at home.

"I think we're having conversations about that and about what the proper time is for the task force to complete its work and for the ongoing efforts to take place on an agency by agency level," Pence said at the White House. He said the group could wind down its work by early June.

Asked about his statements in February playing down the threat of the virus, Trump told ABC in an interview that medical experts also had underestimated the risk and added: "I want to be optimistic. I don't want to be Mr. Doom and Gloom. It's a very bad subject. I'm not looking to tell the American people when nobody really knows what is happening yet, 'Oh this is going to be so tragic.'"

Why are some planes crowded even with air travel down?

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Every once in a while, social media lights up with photos or video from flights that are nearly full, with passengers clearly violating advice from public health officials about social distancing during the coronavirus pandemic.

That raises the question: How can planes still be full when air travel is down more than 90% from a year ago?

In some cases, airlines are creating the crowds by canceling other flights and packing passengers on the few remaining planes. Carriers say, however, that they are taking action to ease passengers' fears about coronavirus contagion. Some are blocking middle seats — or letting passengers pay extra to guarantee an empty seat next to them. They are also starting to require passengers to wear facial coverings.

Here are some questions and answers about flying during the coronavirus pandemic.

HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE STILL FLYING?

The number of people traveling on airlines is scraping along at levels not seen in decades, and there are only about 17 passengers on the average domestic flight. But that's just an average.

The number of people passing through airport security checkpoints has been rising since mid-April, but it is still down 93% from a year ago. The Transportation Security Administration screened 163,692 people on Monday, compared with nearly 2.5 million on the comparable day a year ago.

SO WHY ARE SOME FLIGHTS FULL?

Partly it is due to the high number of canceled flights.

"On routes where there used to be scores of flights between the different carriers, now there may be two or three," says Robert Mann, a former airline executive and now a consultant in the New York area.

Airlines slash their flight schedules, and then they cancel even more flights in the last few days before departure. That can force passengers who were booked on several different flights to board the same plane.

Planes are more likely to be crowded on certain routes, especially those between so-called hub airports operated by the same airline.

ARE AIRLINES SPACING PASSENGERS?

Several carriers are blocking some middle seats.

Delta Air Lines said Tuesday that through June 30, it will also block some window and aisle seats, leaving 50% of first class and 60% of the main cabin empty. Southwest CEO Gary Kelly said his airline will temporarily cap the number of seats it sells, probably at 67% of capacity.

Frontier Airlines said Monday that through Aug. 31 it will guarantee passengers get an empty middle seat next to them — if they pay an extra fee ranging from \$39 to \$89.

"Sure, there are people saying, 'You're charging for social distancing?' No, no, no," Frontier CEO Barry Biffle told The Associated Press. "We are offering the option, and it is guaranteed. We don't believe you

need it -- if everybody is wearing a facial covering -- to be safe."

Brett Snyder, who runs the Cranky Flier website and a travel concierge business in California, said it was a great product for Frontier to sell during the downturn in travel.

"Why not make money on a seat that is going to be empty anyway?" he said.

So far, other carriers haven't copied Frontier.

WHAT ABOUT FACE MASKS?

All the leading U.S. airlines have announced plans to start requiring passengers to wear facial coverings during flights. JetBlue Airways was the first to announce the policy, which took effect Monday. The big four — Delta, American, United and Southwest — followed suit in recent days.

Airlines say they won't let customers without masks board a plane. Small children and people with medical conditions that make a mask hazardous will generally be exempt, and others will be allowed to briefly remove coverings while eating or drinking.

Crews are bracing for the inevitable passenger who will flout the rules.

"We're not going to land a plane because somebody won't keep their mask on unless they are violent or crazy," said an industry official who wasn't authorized to discuss the airline's procedures and requested anonymity. "We will flag that for corporate security, and they may not be welcome to fly us again."

The airlines are also requiring crew members to wear face masks.

HOW DO AIRLINES CLEAN PLANES?

Every airline says it has stepped up the cleaning of plane cabins to help prevent spread of the coronavirus. Some, like Delta, say they are using misting machines to spray anti-viral chemicals inside the cabin.

Airlines insist that the air inside their planes is safe to breathe. Cabin air on most jetliners is a mix of fresh air from the outside and recirculated air that is passed through high-efficiency or HEPA filters designed to trap most airborne particles.

HOW LONG WILL THESE CHANGES LAST?

Until there is a proven treatment or widely available vaccine for COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus, the changes are likely to stay in place.

If people start venturing out on airplanes this summer, it won't look anything like summer 2019.

Traffic "will be light, you will have to wear a mask, there will be social distancing on planes and reduced on-board service to limit contact," Snyder said. "If there really isn't a vaccine until the first half of next year, you're not going to see anything approaching a new normal until next summer at the earliest."

Harry and Meghan mark son's 1st birthday with charity video

LONDON (AP) — The Duke and Duchess of Sussex have released a video of Meghan reading to their son as they mark Archie's 1st birthday and promote a campaign to help children during the coronavirus pandemic.

The video shows Meghan sitting with Archie on her lap and reading one of his favorite books, "Duck! Rabbit!" Archie grabs at the pages and helps turn them during the reading. Harry, who filmed the short video, whoops and says "bravo" from behind the camera at the end.

The three-minute video was posted Wednesday on the Instagram accounts of Save With Stories and Save the Children U.K. for a fundraising campaign with the goal bringing food and learning resources to children and families struggling during the pandemic.

Archie Harrison Mountbatten-Windsor was born on May 6, 2019 at London's Portland Hospital. His parents chose not to pose with their newborn outside the hospital, a recent tradition in Harry's family, and decided against giving the baby a royal name.

Archie had an eventful first year. He accompanied his parents on a tour of Africa and at the age of 4 months was introduced to Archbishop Desmond Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize winner.

Harry and Meghan shocked many early this year with an announcement that they intended to quit as senior royals and split their time between Britain and North America. They couple officially stepped down from royal duties at the end of March, saying they were giving up public funding and seeking financial independence.

The family went from living in a cottage on the grounds of Windsor Castle, to Vancouver Island in Canada and then on to Los Angeles before lockdown measures commenced.

EU forecasts 'recession of historic proportions' this year

By LORNE COOK Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Union predicted Wednesday "a recession of historic proportions this year" due to the impact of the coronavirus as it released its first official estimates of the damage the pandemic is inflicting on the bloc's economy.

The 27-nation EU economy is predicted to contract by 7.5% this year, before growing about 6% in 2021, assuming countries steadily ease their lockdowns.

The group of 19 nations using the euro as their currency will see a record decline of 7.75% this year, and grow by 6.25% in 2021, the European Commission said in its Spring economic forecast.

"It is now quite clear that the EU has entered the deepest economic recession in its history," EU Economy Commissioner Paolo Gentiloni told reporters in Brussels. As the virus hit, "economic activity in the EU dropped by around one third practically overnight," he said.

More than 1.1 million people have contracted the virus across Europe and over 137,000 have died, according to the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. Unclear outbreak data, low testing rates and the strain on health care systems mean the true scale of the pandemic is much greater.

With the spread slowing in most European countries, people are cautiously venturing out from confinement and gradually returning to work, but strict health measures remain in place amid concern of a second wave of outbreaks and any return to something like normal life is at least months away.

The pandemic has hurt consumer spending, industrial output, investment, trade, capital flows and supply chains. It has also hit jobs. The unemployment rate across the 27-nation EU is forecast to rise from 6.7% last year to 9% in 2020 but then fall to around 8% in 2021, the commission said. Beyond that, Gentiloni said, "we will have a massive drop in hours worked."

Globally, the pandemic is expected to cause the deepest recession in living memory, with the International Monetary Fund forecasting a 3% decline this year. The UN says that is expected to cause a drop in work hours equivalent to 305 million full-time jobs.

Inflation in Europe is also set to be significantly weaker as consumer prices fall amid a sharp weakening of demand and drop in oil prices. Investment too is likely to contract, with firms expected to postpone or cancel their investment plans amid the uncertainty. Exporters will not be spared, with continued disruption to movements of people, goods and services likely.

Italy and Spain - two of the countries hardest hit by the virus - and to a lesser extent France are among the economies that will suffer most. Greece, which largely escaped the disease but whose economy was ravaged previously by its debt crisis and which relies heavily on tourism, is also high on the economic hit list.

France's economy is expected to shrink by about 8.2%, while Germany will endure a more moderate contraction than most and recover better. Still, it is set to experience this year its worst recession since World War II, with exports notably hit, with a drop in output of 6.5%.

While the virus hit every member country, the extent of the damage it ultimately inflicts will depend on the evolution of the disease in each of them, the resilience of their economies and what policies they put in place to respond.

Gentiloni said that the depth of the recession and the strength of recovery will be uneven across the world's biggest trading bloc.

Much will depend, he said, on "the speed at which lockdowns can be lifted, the importance of services like tourism in each economy and by each country's financial resources. Such divergence poses a threat to the single market and the euro area - yet it can be mitigated through decisive, joint European action."

He noted that the unpredictability surrounding the future spread of the coronavirus made drawing up the commission's economic forecast "particularly challenging." The numbers are based on the assumption that lockdowns will be gradually lifted from this month onward.

"A more severe and longer lasting pandemic than currently envisaged could cause a far larger fall in GDP than assumed," the commission said.

How quickly things can change. On Feb. 13, the commission had predicted "a path of steady, moderate growth" this year and next of 1.2%. At that time, uncertainty over U.S. trade policy and a Brexit trade deal plus tensions in Latin America and the Middle East were the main threats.

The coronavirus outbreak in China was noted at the time as "a new downside risk" but the commission's assumption less than three months ago was "that the outbreak peaks in the first quarter, with relatively limited global spillovers."

Astronomers find closest black hole to Earth, hints of more

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Meet your new but shy galactic neighbor: A black hole left over from the death of a fleeting young star. European astronomers have found the closest black hole to Earth yet, so near that the two stars dancing with it can be seen by the naked eye.

Of course, close is relative on the galactic scale. This black hole is about 1,000 light-years away and each light-year is 5.9 trillion miles (9.5 trillion kilometers). But in terms of the cosmos and even the galaxy, it is in our neighborhood, said European Southern Observatory astronomer Thomas Rivinius, who led the study published Wednesday in the journal *Astronomy & Astrophysics*.

The previous closest black hole is probably about three times further, about 3,200 light-years, he said.

The discovery of a closer black hole, which is in the constellation Telescopium in the Southern Hemisphere, hints that there are more of these out there. Astronomers theorize there are between 100 million to 1 billion of these small but dense objects in the Milky Way.

The trouble is we can't see them. Nothing, not even light, escapes a black hole's gravity. Usually, scientists can only spot them when they're gobbling up sections of a partner star or something else falling into them. Astronomers think most black holes, including this newly discovered one, don't have anything close enough to swallow. So they go undetected.

Astronomers found this one because of the unusual orbit of a star. The new black hole is part of what used to be a three-star dance in a system called HR6819. The two remaining super-hot stars aren't close enough to be sucked in, but the inner star's orbit is warped.

Using a telescope in Chile, they confirmed that there was something about four or five times the mass of our sun pulling on the inner star. It could only be a black hole, they concluded.

Outside astronomers said that makes sense.

"It will motivate additional searches among bright, relatively nearby stars," said Ohio State University astronomer Todd Thompson, who wasn't part of the research.

Like most of these type of black holes this one is tiny, maybe 25 miles (40 kilometers) in diameter.

"Washington, D.C. would quite easily fit into the black hole, and once it went in it, would never come back," said astronomer Dietrich Baade, a study co-author.

These are young hot stars compared to our 4.6 billion-year-old sun. They're maybe 140 million years old, but at 26,000 degrees F (15,000 degrees C) they are three times hotter than the sun, Rivinius said. About 15 million years ago, one of those stars got too big and too hot and went supernova, turning into the black hole in a violent process, he said.

"It is most likely that there are black holes much closer than this one," said Avi Loeb, director of Harvard's Black Hole Initiative, who wasn't part of the study. "If you find an ant while scanning a tiny fraction of your kitchen, you know there must be many more out there."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 65 of 66

Today in History By The Associated Press

Today in History

Today is Thursday, May 7, the 128th day of 2020. There are 238 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 7, 1789, America's first inaugural ball was held in New York in honor of President George Washington, who had taken the oath of office a week earlier.

On this date:

In 1889, the Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore opened its doors.

In 1915, a German U-boat torpedoed and sank the British liner RMS Lusitania off the southern coast of Ireland, killing 1,198 people, including 128 Americans, out of the nearly 2,000 on board.

In 1928, the minimum voting age for British women was lowered from 30 to 21 — the same age as men.

In 1939, Germany and Italy announced a military and political alliance known as the Rome-Berlin Axis.

In 1945, Germany signed an unconditional surrender at Allied headquarters in Rheims (rams), France, ending its role in World War II.

In 1946, Sony Corp. had its beginnings as the Tokyo Telecommunications Engineering Corp. was founded in the Japanese capital by Akio Morita and Masaru Ibuka.

In 1954, the 55-day Battle of Dien Bien Phu in Vietnam ended with Vietnamese insurgents overrunning French forces.

In 1963, the United States launched the Telstar 2 communications satellite.

In 1975, President Gerald R. Ford formally declared an end to the "Vietnam era." In Ho Chi Minh City — formerly Saigon — the Viet Cong celebrated its takeover.

In 1992, the latest addition to America's space shuttle fleet, Endeavour, went on its first flight.

In 1998, the parent company of Mercedes-Benz agreed to buy Chrysler Corp. for more than \$37 billion. Londoners voted overwhelmingly to elect their own mayor for the first time in history. (In May 2000, Ken Livingstone was elected.)

In 2004, Army Pfc. Lynndie England, shown in photographs smiling and pointing at naked Iraqi prisoners, was charged by the military with assaulting the detainees and conspiring to mistreat them. (England was later convicted of conspiracy, mistreating detainees and committing an indecent act, and sentenced to 36 months; she served half that term.)

Ten years ago: A BP-chartered vessel lowered a 100-ton concrete-and-steel vault onto the ruptured Deepwater Horizon well in an unprecedented, and ultimately unsuccessful, attempt to stop most of the gushing crude fouling the sea. Before a record hockey crowd of 77,803, the United States lost to host Germany 2-1 in the opening game of the world ice hockey championships. Dave Fisher, lead singer of the 1960s folk group the Highwaymen, died in Rye, New York, at age 69.

Five years ago: After years of sharing power, British Prime Minister David Cameron pulled off an unexpected election triumph that gave the Conservative leader a second term with an outright parliamentary majority. A three-judge panel of the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York ruled that the National Security Agency's bulk collection of millions of Americans' phone records was illegal. Alex Rodriguez passed Willie Mays for fourth on the career home run list, connecting for No. 661 and helping the New York Yankees beat the Baltimore Orioles 4-3.

One year ago: Two gunmen opened fire inside a charter school in a Denver suburb not far from Columbine High School, killing a student, 18-year-old Kendrick Castillo, who authorities said had charged at the shooters to protect classmates; two students at the school were charged in the attack. (A 16-year-old, Alec McKinney, pleaded guilty to 17 felonies and awaits sentencing; 19-year-old Devon Erickson pleaded not guilty to the same charges.) FBI Director Chris Wray told a Senate panel that he had no evidence that the FBI had illegally monitored President Donald Trump's campaign during the 2016 election. Two Reuters journalists who'd been imprisoned in Myanmar for reporting on the military's abuses of Rohingya Muslims were freed in a mass presidential pardon. Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp signed into law one of the nation's

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, May 07, 2020 ~ Vol. 28 - No. 299 ~ 66 of 66

most restrictive abortion laws, a measure that banned the procedure once a fetal heartbeat is detected. (A federal judge later blocked the law from taking effect.)

Today's Birthdays: Rhythm-and-blues singer Thelma Houston is 77. Actress Robin Strasser is 75. Singer-songwriter Bill Danoff is 74. Rock musician Bill Kreutzmann (Grateful Dead) is 74. Utah Gov. Gary Herbert is 73. Rock musician Prairie Prince is 70. Movie writer-director Amy Heckerling is 68. Actor Michael E. Knight is 61. Rock musician Phil Campbell (Motorhead) is 59. Country musician Rick Schell is 57. Rock singer-musician Chris O'Connor (Primitive Radio Gods) is 55. Actress Traci Lords is 52. Actor Morocco Omari is 50. Singer Eagle-Eye Cherry is 49. Actor Breckin Meyer is 46. Rock musician Matt Helders (Arctic Monkeys) is 34. Actress-comedian Aidy Bryant is 33. Actor Taylor Abrahamse is 29. Actor Alexander Ludwig is 28. Actress Dylan Gelula is 26.

Thought for Today: "There are those who believe something, and therefore will tolerate nothing; and on the other hand, those who tolerate everything, because they believe nothing." — Robert Browning, English poet (born this date in 1812; died in 1889).

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